

1 **Student-Athletes', Coaches' and Administrators' Perspectives of Sexual Violence**  
2 **Prevention on Three Campuses with NCAA Division I and II Athletic Programs**  
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4 David Stoddard Carey<sup>1,2</sup>, Stephanie Sumstine, MPH<sup>2,3</sup>, Claire Amabile<sup>1,2,4</sup>, Heather Helvink<sup>4</sup>,  
5 Cierra Raine Sorin, MA<sup>2,5</sup>, Dallas Swendeman, PhD, MPH<sup>2,3</sup>, Eunhee Park, MPH<sup>2,6</sup>, Jennifer A.  
6 Wagman, PhD, MHS<sup>2,6</sup>  
7

8 <sup>1</sup> *University of California Santa Barbara, Department of Global Studies Alumni*

9 <sup>2</sup> *University of California Global Health Institute Women's Health, Gender, and Empowerment*  
10 *Center of Expertise*

11 <sup>3</sup> *Department of Psychiatry & Biobehavioral Sciences, David Geffen School of Medicine,*  
12 *University of California Los Angeles*

13 <sup>4</sup> *Center on Gender Equity and Health, School of Medicine, University of California San Diego*

14 <sup>5</sup> *University of California Santa Barbara, Department of Sociology*

15 <sup>6</sup> *Department of Community Health Sciences, Fielding School of Public Health, University of*  
16 *California Los Angeles*  
17

18 Corresponding author: Jennifer A. Wagman, PhD, MHS  
19 Assistant Professor  
20 UCLA Fielding School of Public Health  
21 Department of Community Health Sciences  
22 650 Charles E. Young Drive South  
23 46-071B CHS, Box 951772  
24 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1772  
25 Phone: (310) 825-5047  
26 Email: jennwagman@ucla.edu  
27  
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46

**Abstract**

47 Research has found associations between intercollegiate athletics and risk for sexual violence,  
48 and that sexual violence is more pervasive at colleges and universities with National Collegiate  
49 Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I athletic programs, relative to NCAA Division II, NCAA  
50 Division III and no athletic programs. Simultaneously, sports involvement is linked with  
51 prosocial values and there are documented developmental benefits of sports participation.  
52 College athletic programs hold promise for fostering sexual violence prevention but there is  
53 limited knowledge about how student-athletes conceptualize sexual violence and how athletes,  
54 coaches and administrators perceive available prevention and response programs. We conducted  
55 7 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 21 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with student-athletes,  
56 athletic directors, and coaches from public university Division I (n=2) and Division II (n=1)  
57 campuses. We assessed perceptions of sexual violence, knowledge and opinions of available  
58 prevention and response programs, and sought input on how to bridge gaps in campus sexual  
59 violence policies. Student-athletes associated sexual violence with alcohol in their relationships  
60 with peers and asymmetrical power dynamics in relationships with coaches and faculty. Athletes  
61 felt strong connections with teammates and sports programs but isolated from the larger campus.  
62 This created barriers to students' use of services and the likelihood of reporting sexual violence.  
63 Athletes felt the mandatory sexual violence prevention training, including additional NCAA  
64 components, were ineffective and offered to protect the university and its athletic programs from  
65 legal complications or cultural ridicule. Athletic staff were aware of policies and programs for

66 reporting and referring sexual violence cases but their knowledge on how these served students  
67 was limited. Student-athletes were uncomfortable disclosing information regarding relationships  
68 and sexual violence to coaches and preferred peer-led prevention approaches.

69 **Keywords**

70 Reporting/Disclosure < Sexual Assault, Support seeking < Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment;  
71 Prevention, Sports, College Athlete, Sport, Student resources

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**Introduction**

76 In 2020, sexual violence remains a critical issue on U.S. college and university campuses, despite  
77 the federal Clery Act, mandatory sexual assault prevention education at some schools, and  
78 targeted campus violence prevention programs (Gash & Harding, 2018) in the #MeToo era.  
79 Sexual violence is an all-encompassing, non-legal term that refers to any sexual act, comment, or  
80 advance against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their  
81 relationship to a victim that includes, but is not limited to, sexual assault (including rape) and  
82 sexual harassment (WHO, 2002).

83 Estimates suggest one third of all female and one tenth of all male undergraduates in the U.S.  
84 experience sexual violence at some point during their time at college or university (Fedina,  
85 Holmes, & Backes, 2018). Additionally, female undergraduates report significantly more  
86 incidents than male undergraduates (Banyard et al., 2007). Research also suggests other groups  
87 have heightened vulnerability for experiencing campus sexual violence, including gay versus  
88 heterosexual men; bisexual versus heterosexual people, and black transgender versus white  
89 transgender people (Fedina et al., 2018). Identifying those at highest risk for violence on  
90 campuses is essential for designing effective prevention and treatment approaches. Likewise,  
91 perpetrators must be identified, held accountable, offered their own treatment and involved in  
92 prevention programming.

93 Several of the most well-publicized cases of sexual violence to emerge during the #MeToo  
94 era, so far, have involved key figures in intercollegiate athletics. Perpetrators have included  
95 student-athletes (e.g., Baylor University Bears football players were convicted for sexual assault  
96 between 2012 and 2016), coaches (e.g., Ohio State University diving coach, William Bohonyi,  
97 who was found guilty of sexually abusing a 16 year-old female athlete), and athletic staff (e.g.,  
98 Larry Nassar, former physician at Michigan State University convicted of sexually abusing  
99 hundreds of female athletes). College sports systems represent a unique population including  
100 450,000 student-athletes for understanding the problem of campus violence and for developing  
101 solutions. This is particularly the case given research indicating that, compared to non-athletes,  
102 male college student-athletes are more likely to use sexual violence against both female and male  
103 undergraduates (Bonomi et al., 2018; Schaaf et al., 2019) and to be serial perpetrators (Foubert,  
104 Clark-Taylor, & Wall, 2020; Seabrook, McMahon, & O'Connor, 2018).

105 The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the organization that regulates and  
106 administers intercollegiate athletics at four year colleges in the U.S. NCAA member institutions  
107 are divided into 3 divisions: Division I, Division II, and Division III. There are 351 colleges and  
108 universities in Division I and these schools have the largest student bodies, athletics budgets, and  
109 athletic scholarships. There are 308 and 443 colleges and universities in Divisions II and III,  
110 respectively, and smaller schools generally compete in these two divisions (“NCAA Recruiting  
111 Facts,” 2016). In 2015, the NCAA formed a Sexual Assault Task Force to help athletic  
112 departments engage in education, collaboration and compliance surrounding sexual violence  
113 (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). To guide understanding of sexual violence, as  
114 it occurs on a continuum, the NCAA provides the following definitions of sexual assault, rape  
115 and sexual harassment. *Sexual assault* refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without

116 explicit consent and includes forcible and non-forcible rape and sexual battery. *Rape* is one form  
117 of sexual assault that is uniformly defined as “penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or  
118 anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without  
119 the consent of the victim.” *Sexual harassment* includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for  
120 sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature that prohibits a person’s  
121 ability to participate in, or benefit from, a school’s education program or workplace, including  
122 conditioning the granting of an educational benefit based on submission of sexual conduct  
123 (National Collegiate Athletic Association & Sport Science Institute, 2016).

124 In 2017, the NCAA Board of Governors adopted a policy on campus sexual violence that  
125 requires campus leaders, including university chancellors or presidents, directors of athletics and  
126 Title IX coordinators at each NCAA member institution to certify that athletes, coaches and  
127 administrators have been educated on sexual violence, that athletic departments are  
128 knowledgeable and compliant with school policies on sexual violence, and that institutional  
129 sexual violence policies and processes and the Title IX coordinator’s contact information is  
130 available to everyone in the department of athletics (National Collegiate Athletic Association &  
131 Sport Science Institute, 2016). These are important actions given research suggesting higher rates  
132 of sexual assault occur on NCAA campuses, relative to non-member campuses (Wiersma-  
133 Mosley, Jozkowski, & Martinez, 2017) and significantly more violence against women occurs on  
134 Division I campuses versus Division II, III schools and universities with no athletic programs  
135 (Wiersma-Mosley & Jozkowski, 2019).

136 Individual colleges and universities have also developed policies and procedures to address  
137 violence and make campuses safer for students, including focused programs for student-athletes,  
138 many of which aim to develop positive player/coach relationships by capitalizing on coaches’

139 positions of authority and influence over athletes. Some institutions provide coaches with tools to  
140 help student-athletes develop leadership and non-violent conflict resolution skills (Kimble,  
141 Russo, Bergman, & Galindo, 2010). While few of these programs have been evaluated, some  
142 evidence suggests coach-led interventions can effectively reduce college student-athletes'  
143 alcohol use (Foubert et al., 2020), increase awareness of campus resources for sexual violence  
144 and shift attitudes about the acceptability of interpersonal violence (Tredinnick & McMahon,  
145 2019). Bystander prevention is another commonly used approach with student-athletes that is  
146 promoted by the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association & Sport Science Institute,  
147 2016). A study with Division I football players found those trained by their coach to recognize  
148 signs, symptoms and consequences of sexual violence and unhealthy relationships were more  
149 likely to positively intervene as bystanders in risky situations (Kroshus, Paskus, & Bell, 2018).

150       Important gaps remain in our understanding of sexual violence prevention among  
151 intercollegiate athletes. For instance, although higher rates of sexual assault have been recorded  
152 on Division I campuses versus campuses with Division II or III or no athletic programs, we do  
153 not know how NCAA student-athletes conceptualize sexual violence, in or out of the context of  
154 sports. We are also unaware of how they perceive current sexual violence policies and programs  
155 at their college/university or within their athletic program, or how athletic directors and coaches  
156 feel about their role. Further, despite many colleges and the NCAA promoting coach-led  
157 interventions and peer-to-peer bystander training, the acceptability of these programs has not  
158 been widely assessed. The current study aimed to fill these gaps by talking with intercollegiate  
159 student-athletes, coaches and administrators at three NCAA Division I and II university  
160 campuses about sexual violence prevention and response in their athletic programs, and seeking

161 their thoughts on how to foster partnerships between academic and athletic departments to create  
162 a climate and culture that promotes safe relationships and prevents sexual violence on campus.

163 **Methods**

164 **Research Setting**

165 The University of California is a public university system with 10 undergraduate campuses, eight  
166 of which are part of the NCAA. Six are Division I, one is Division II, and one is Division III.  
167 The current study took place at two of the Division I UC campuses (Los Angeles [UCLA] and  
168 Santa Barbara [UCSB]) and one Division II UC campus (San Diego [UCSD]). UCLA is part of  
169 the Pac-12 Conference and the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation (MPSF). Because UCLA has  
170 a football program, it is further classified as one of the NCAA Division I Football Bowl  
171 Subdivision (FBS) campuses, placing it in the top level of college football in the United States  
172 and among the largest and most competitive schools in the NCAA. Neither UCSB nor UCSD  
173 have football programs on their campus. As a Division I school, UCSB is considered a Non-  
174 football, Multi-sport campus. It is part of the Big West Conference, with the exception of men's  
175 water polo and volleyball teams, and men's and women's swimming, which are in the MPSF.  
176 UCSD is currently Division II but in 2017 accepted an invitation to join the Big West  
177 Conference and transition over a period of 6 years to NCAA Division I. Men's volleyball and  
178 women's water polo have already started their Big West participation and a full Big West  
179 competitive slate will take place in the current, 2020-21 academic year.

180 Research for this study was led by faculty investigators at each campus, and a team of  
181 sixteen undergraduate (n=10) and graduate (n=6) student research interns at UCLA (5 students),  
182 UCSB (5 students), and UCSD (6 students). Project coordinators supervised and oversaw all



183 student study activities on each campus. All research staff received comprehensive training in  
184 research ethics and compliance, qualitative research methods, and trauma-informed care.

### 185 **Participants and Procedures**

186 Participants were recruited from each campus and included student-athletes, coaches (both  
187 assistant and head coaches) and athletic directors (including overall director, associate director,  
188 deputy director, etc.). Eligibility criteria for all participants were: 1) age of 18 years or older; 2)  
189 currently attending or working at UCLA, UCSB, or UCSD; 3) having a way of being contacted  
190 either by phone or email; 4) consenting to be involved in the study; and 5) English-speaking.  
191 Students were eligible if they played on a Division I or II team. NCAA athletes were prioritized  
192 for recruitment. However, we had difficulty in reaching our target number of student-athlete  
193 participants so ended up allowing club-level sports athletes to participate as well, if they  
194 expressed interest in enrolment. Coaches and administrators were only eligible if they had been  
195 working at the campus for at least 6 months.

196 Recruitment involved a combination of targeted and snowball sampling. Email messages  
197 were sent to all NCAA Division I and II student-athletes, coaches, and athletic directors (ADs),  
198 recruitment flyers were posted near each campus' athletic department and a snowball sample was  
199 also used. All interested individuals were asked to complete a short online survey to screen for  
200 eligibility. Eligible participants were connected, via email or cell phone, to a student researcher  
201 to schedule a date, time and location for an in-depth interview (IDI) or focus group discussion  
202 (FGD). All data collection was done on campus, at an accessible and convenient location like  
203 campus library study room and athletic department office where privacy could be ensured. All  
204 participants provided written informed consent to participate in the study and to have their data

205 collection session audio recorded. All participants received a \$25 Visa gift card in compensation  
206 for their time. The study protocol was approved by the UCSD Human Research Protection  
207 Program, with reliance approval from the institutional review boards (IRB) at UCLA and UCSB.

208 In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted with student-athletes, coaches and athletic  
209 directors. IDIs with students aimed to explore their attitudes about relationships and sex, their  
210 definitions of sexual violence, sexual harassment and healthy relationships, and their awareness  
211 of available services, prevention programs, and/or policies addressing sexual violence at the  
212 university and in their athletic department. We sought students' opinions on how they can  
213 become more involved in making the campus an environment that does not tolerate sexual or  
214 gender-based violence. IDIs with coaches and athletic directors aimed to elucidate department  
215 procedures, services, and protocols for sexual violence response and prevention. Focus Group  
216 Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with student-athletes only and aimed to understand group  
217 norms surrounding the sports environment and how athletics were felt to impact campus safety,  
218 healthy socializing and acceptance/rejection of relationship violence. We explored students'  
219 definitions of healthy vs. unhealthy relationships and sex as well as sexual assault and sexual  
220 harassment. Each discussion was facilitated by a moderator and a note-taker. The goal of each  
221 FGD was to learn how students feel about balancing life as athletes and college students during  
222 the #MeToo era. FGD topics included perceptions of whether sexual violence was a problem on  
223 campus, opinions on how the UC and each athletic department handles and responds to sexual  
224 violence against students. Participants were asked to provide details on the types and quantity of  
225 information they received at college about sexual violence and if they had heard faculty, staff, or  
226 administration address sexual assault or harassment.

## 227 **Qualitative Data Analysis**

228 IDIs and FGDs were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were redacted to  
229 remove personal identifying information and uploaded to Dedoose version 4.5.91 (Sociocultural  
230 Research Consultants 2013). A grounded theory inductive approach was used to code the data  
231 and identify emergent themes and subthemes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ryan & Bernard,  
232 2003). Analysis was done collaboratively by the authors of this paper who developed a coding  
233 tree to create an analytic blueprint of the relationship between the major themes, topics, ideas,  
234 concepts, and terms that emerged during the review of transcripts. During the process of reading  
235 transcripts, the research team discussed the codes that emerged and agreed on categories for  
236 organizing them, including groups of broad conceptual codes that were further refined into sub-  
237 codes. At least two reviewers coded each transcript. The research team participated in continuous  
238 meetings to iteratively revise the codes. The principal investigator (PI) reviewed and signed off  
239 on all themes and helped solved discrepant codes that the team was unable to reach consensus on  
240 to ensure inter-rater reliability. Codes and corresponding excerpts were retained for analysis  
241 upon agreement between the coding team and PI. The first broad code theme was campus  
242 culture, with sub-codes: alcohol use, and sports. Under the sports code, following five sub codes  
243 were developed: coach/player relationship, hierarchy, identity, mentorship, and role as athletes.  
244 The second broad code theme was services, with sub-codes: prevention, online training, and  
245 NCAA requirements. The third broad code theme was knowledge and awareness. The fourth was  
246 reasons for not reporting. The fifth broad code theme was values, attitudes and beliefs.

## 247 **Results**

248 We conducted 21 IDIs with student-athletes (n=12) and athletic directors and coaches (n=9), and  
249 7 FGDs with male (n=4) and female (n=3) student-athletes. Sixty individuals participated from  
250 the three campuses, including 51 student-athletes and 9 athletic department staff members,

251 including head and assistant coaches and athletic directors including deputy directors, associate  
252 directors, etc. To maintain confidentiality of staff members, we collectively refer to all coaches  
253 and directors as “athletic staff.” Most student-athletes (39%) and athletic staff (45%) were from  
254 UCSD. Among the student-athletes, 32 (63%) were female and 19 (27%) were male. Athletes  
255 were from 11 NCAA sports teams and three student-run sports clubs (see Table 1 for details).

256 [INSERT TABLE 1]

### 257 **Defining Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment**

258 To understand how participants conceptualized the language of sexual violence, we asked them  
259 to define ‘sexual assault’ and ‘sexual harassment’ with their own words. All struggled to  
260 distinguish between the two. This lack of clarity was felt to be a barrier to violence prevention.

261 *“I think one of the biggest proponents of sexual assault is the lack of recognizing what is*  
262 *sexual assault and what is not (sexual assault).” - Male Athlete, FGD participant*

264 Students explained that although they hear the vocabulary of sexual violence repeatedly, they  
265 don’t regularly give much thought to what each distinct experience or term encompasses.

266 *“I hear about sexual assault all the time, like in the media and throughout the (college)*  
267 *orientation programs, but it's never really been drilled into my head - like what it is and*  
268 *how to deal with it.” - Female Athlete, FGD participant*

270 Students said it was further difficult to quantify the magnitude of sexual violence on their  
271 campus because of “gray areas” around consent make it hard to seek services when negative  
272 sexual experiences cause discomfort or feelings of harm/violation but do not fall under a legal  
273 definition of sexual assault.

274 *“Let's say people are making out and that's okay. And then it seems like it's okay to go*  
275 *further, but one person hesitates. They don't want to continue. But in the moment it's a*  
276 *gray area. Is it sexual assault? If it was consensual in the beginning and then leads to*  
277 *something else that - you know - may or may not have been consensual...Is that sexual*  
278 *assault? Even though two people were like, “we're okay with it” when starting... that's*  
279 *where I don't know. Where would you draw the line?” - Female Athlete, FGD participant*

281 Although anyone can experience sexual violence, participants primarily conceptualized sexual  
282 assault and harassment as violence against women, perpetrated by men. The context in which  
283 men used violence was consistently categorized in two main groups: violence in situations  
284 defined by asymmetrical power dynamics and alcohol and drug-related violence. Two of the  
285 most influential relationships in the lives of student-athletes are those with their coaches and  
286 professors. All participants recognized that coaches and professors can positively influence the  
287 lives of college athletes. At the same time, their power was also noted as a tool they could use to  
288 manipulate students *into* abusive relationships and *out of* reporting it to anyone.

289  
290 *“I have very strong feelings about the lack of major influence the university has on*  
291 *faculty involved in inappropriate behavior within the college environment. And*  
292 *obviously, we have those relationships too, potentially, in athletics - the relationships*  
293 *with a coach... a male coach, coaching female athletes, for example. As an athletic*  
294 *administrator - I'm just going to be candid - I think there needs to be some real emphasis*  
295 *on the role of these adults when it comes to sexual assault and relationships.” - Athletic*  
296 *Staff, IDI participant*

298 Relationships with faculty were not addressed much in interviews, but student-athletes narrated  
299 feelings of limited negotiating power in their relationships with coaches. They said it was always  
300 important for them to please their coaches and project strength and ability. Bringing things up to  
301 their coach about sexual violence triggered fears of seeming vulnerable, weak, or like a non-team  
302 player, and as a result losing playing time or a spot on the starting lineup. One female student  
303 said she and other women athletes are reluctant to address abuse in the sports system because  
304 they want to be recognized for their strength, and don't “want to come out about it and look all  
305 prudish or lame.” A male student-athlete said he and his peers kept quiet out of “an inherent fear  
306 of authority” and “social anxiety mixed with not wanting to go through a legal system.” Students  
307 felt unprotected (from authority figures) by the university's policies or prevention approaches.

308  
309 *“Part of the problem is you can educate people for the better, but when you have*  
310 *individuals in power, like coaches, they can set the culture back and really do a lot of*

311 *damage to the way these issues, like sexual violence, are approached and talked about.”*  
312 - Male Athlete, FGD participant

### 314 **Alcohol Use and Sexual Violence among Athletes**

315 From the perspective of student-athletes, peer-to-peer sexual violence (i.e., assault perpetrated by  
316 one student against another) was thought to mostly involve alcohol or substance use. There was  
317 consensus, including among staff, that drugs and alcohol were readily available on campuses.

318 *“These kids are coming to college and there's alcohol everywhere, right? ... Well we've*  
319 *noticed it's becoming a bigger problem, you know - they are even using Oxycontin and*  
320 *mixing those kinds of drugs and alcohol and it can have a real negative effect.”* - Athletic  
321 Staff, IDI participant

322 Students perceived drinking as a ritual of college life and heavy episodic drinking (or “binge  
323 drinking”) was normalized. Student-athletes ‘partied’ a lot together and, often isolated from non-  
324 athlete students. Participants also felt that student athletes were more likely to “binge drink”  
325 than non-athlete students, and the most severe, negative consequences were believed to be  
326 experienced by female students/athletes.

327 *“At every party I've been to here, the guys are kind of drunk and having a good time but*  
328 *the girls are blacked out.”* - Male Athlete, IDI participant

329 Participants theorized that athletes “binge” on alcohol more frequently than their non-athlete  
330 counterparts because practices of their full athletic-academic schedules, leaving short periods of  
331 time to socialize, where they need to compensate by cramming all their downtime activities and  
332 social events, including drinking into limited windows of free time.

333 *“Because of their seasons and their practice and game structure - binge drinking*  
334 *happens. Because the student can't drink and then suddenly they CAN for one night. You*  
335 *know when you tie all that to the issues that occur when both men and women are*  
336 *together and have been drinking, um, that that's where we end up - with athletes having*  
337 *more problems than the average student. I think those are things we can continue to*  
338 *address in multiple ways. It's not just, ‘Oh, these are athletes so they're more likely to be*  
339 *rapists,’ which is what the misconception is. It's more of how they end up in situations*  
340 *and how we can educate them not to.”* - Athletic Staff, IDI participant

341 As illustrated in the above quote, participants linked alcohol use with increased risk for sexual  
342 assault by complicating someone’s ability to negotiate sexual consent.

349  
350 *“With drinking...I think that hinders the ability to recognize sexual assault even worse. I*  
351 *think wholeheartedly that alcohol does contribute to sexual assault.” - Male Athlete,*  
352 *FGD participant*

354 With a better sense of participants’ understanding of sexual violence, we asked them about their  
355 involvement on campus and within the sports system and how it influenced their feelings of  
356 connectedness to school and their perceived risk for sexual violence.

### 357 **Athletic Identity and Campus Involvement**

358 Membership to NCAA athletic program was a great source of pride as well as stress for student-  
359 athletes. It is important to understand the identity as a student-athlete when designing sexual  
360 violence prevention programs and services. Student-athletes repeatedly narrated pride  
361 surrounding their membership - as an elite athlete - in the large, nationally recognized University  
362 of California athletic system.

363  
364 *“I am proud... we’ve moved up in the rankings nationally from public institution and*  
365 *stuff. So it’s really become more of a, like, prestigious university. It’s really cool to be at*  
366 *a place that has that much respect, national respect.” - Female Athlete, FGD participant*

368 Many felt honored to serve as NCAA athletic representatives of their campus. Participation in  
369 sports contributed to a strong and positive identity among athletes, making them feel like unique  
370 members of campus who were not only students, but serving as the face of university.

371  
372 *“I think my personal pride comes from being in athletics and that makes me feel rooted*  
373 *with teammates, and other people are looking out for me. And then that's what I value*  
374 *most - I'm an athlete not just a student.” - Female Athlete, FGD participant*

376 Athletes also recognized the benefit of being part of an organized team, including learning the  
377 importance of cooperation, building on each other’s strengths while accepting each other’s  
378 weaknesses, providing physical and emotional support to others, and developing respect for self  
379 and teammates. These attributes carried a powerful sense of commitment to “having your  
380 teammates’ backs” - both on and off the field.

381

382 *"I think for a fact if I was ever at a party and my teammates were there and I got into any*  
383 *sort of altercation with someone else, I know every single person on my team that was*  
~~384~~ *there that saw it would instantly jump in."* - Male Athlete, FGD participant

386 For some, particularly male athletes, the ongoing sense of alliance and loyalty among teammates  
387 created a strong sense of belonging on campus.

388 *"I think athletics definitely has a stronger sense of belonging just because we are here to*  
389 *support each other in athletics."*- Male Athlete, FGD participant  
~~390~~

392 Some of the club-level female-athletes felt the closeness of teammates increased their safety.

393 *"You need a group of people looking out for you all the time. I usually go out with my*  
394 *friends from rugby. We are a lot more aggressive than your typical women. So we see*  
~~395~~ *something, we do something."* - Female Athlete, IDI participant

397 Overwhelmingly, however, most student-athletes felt a substantial divide between the academic  
398 and athletic sides of their own campus lives. Students narrated limited feelings of connection  
399 with the larger campus community and, sometimes, even beyond their own team.

400 *"I'm more connected with my team than the Triton community as a whole, just because*  
401 *we spend so much time together and also have the same schedule so we hang out, outside*  
402 *of practice a lot, but, as a whole community, it's not like we do a lot. There's not a whole*  
~~403~~ *lot of community in general at UCSD."* - Male Athlete, FGD participant

406 A consistent message was that student-athletes face great pressure to balance two equally  
407 demanding endeavors - a sports career and full-time enrolment at an academically competitive  
408 university. Students struggled to "do it all" and athletic staff also recognized athletes' ongoing  
409 challenges with anxiety over sports and academic performance, pressure to maintain athletic  
410 scholarships, and fear of disappointing parents or coaches, among other stressors.

411 *"....dealing with some of the pressures and some of the common things that student*  
412 *athletes say they deal with, as it relates to social media, and failure, and feeling anxiety,*  
413 *and home sick, depression...some of those things. I definitely think students face so many*  
414 *unique stressors and then with athletics on top, plus many other responsibilities."*-  
~~415~~ Athletic Staff, IDI participant

418 Athletic departments respond with attempts to mitigate stresses and offer resources and services  
419 for student-athletes, particularly in the area of academic support.

420



421 *"They have help - tutors and mentors and study groups. They really have a lot of*  
422 *resources for them to use."*- Athletic Staff, IDI participant

424 Despite these resources, students said they felt pressed to do everything well, and additional  
425 anxiety from always needing to act like leaders of their campus and the UC system. While - as  
426 noted - this ambassador-type identity sometimes created pride for students, it also commonly  
427 added to what seemed like a stretched, sometimes unattainable, list of responsibilities.

428 *"...student conduct has come up a lot, because they drill it into our mindset. We're*  
429 *representing the university and all that. We're playing other teams and other schools so*  
430 *we have to really be model citizens, model students."* - Male Athlete, IDI participant

### 431 **Associations between Intercollegiate Athletics, Mental Health and Sexual Violence**

434 In addition to enriching their lives, participants narrated how playing competitive sports took  
435 away from time for other activities, interests, relationships. Division I and II athletes said  
436 dedication to their sport came at the expense of taking part in activities most students look  
437 forward to in college, such as time with friends, parties and social events. Many club-level  
438 athletes specifically decided against NCAA-level play in order to have more rounded college  
439 experience, where they were not limited by their sport schedule.

440 *"You can miss out on a lot of things with practices and games from travel and stuff. So I*  
441 *feel like if we were just regular students, we would be able to do more."* - Female  
442 Athlete, IDI participant

443 The pressures felt by many NCAA athletes gave them a sense of social isolation and limited  
444 social support, both of which are associated with adverse health outcomes (Leigh-Hunt et al.,  
445 2017) and were referenced in our study. Interviews with students, coaches and directors revealed  
446 rising numbers of student-athletes are living with anxiety and depression.

449 *"I've worked at [named 3 private colleges] and I'd say this (UC campus) is probably the*  
450 *hardest to do well in, academically. The stress and pressure here... I think it probably*  
451 *adds up and gets to the kids. A lot of those kids - maybe half of them - don't have a great*  
452 *network of friends, or the social skills or time to make those friends. I think that can be*  
453 *internalized and turned into anxieties and depression."* - Athletic Staff, IDI participant

454  
455

456 Stigma was noted a main reason given for student-athletes choosing to not seek assistance for  
457 mental health issues or sexual violence. Athletes feared disclosing mental health symptoms like  
458 depression or reporting sexual assault or harassment would make them seem weak or  
459 problematic, potentially impacting their athletic career and future chances of professional play.

460  
461 *“There is stigma around being the victim in any situation, whether it's sexual assault or*  
462 *anything else. I think this is especially so, being an athlete. You don't necessarily want to*  
463 *be portrayed as being weak. There's talk of mental strength and the mental part of being*  
464 *an athlete. I think that's a huge part of what is encouraged of us, or voiced to us. So I*  
465 *think it's like, ‘oh this [referring to being a victim of sexual assault] is just another way*  
466 *for me to NOT be mentally stronger.’ I think it kind of also plays into the mental illness*  
467 *stigma and how you're kind of looked down upon... if you come out as being vulnerable*  
468 *and weak, as an athlete.” - Female Athlete, FGD participant*

470 Some female NCAA athletes felt the high-profile image of being a Division I or II player and the  
471 tight-knit nature of the athletic department reduced their ability to self-protect from harm and  
472 discrimination, particularly in light of new Title IX rules on college campuses, allowing accused  
473 perpetrators to cross-examine the victim during a live hearing. Some women interpreted this  
474 policy change, precluding a victim's ability to remain anonymous, as a major gap in support for  
475 survivors on college campuses - particularly student-athlete survivors who are assaulted by  
476 another student-athlete, in a system where players are shaped to feel obligated to protect fellow  
477 athletes and the interests of the athletic department, even if it compromises their own welfare.

478  
479 *“This past month, someone on our team was assaulted by another athlete and she's not*  
480 *reporting it, since he's a part of the athletic department. If we say his name, then Title IX*  
481 *- because the rule just changed - would, instead of putting it under Title IX as his case, it*  
482 *would go under her name. She (the assault victim) sent out a text to make sure it was in*  
483 *his name. Because if it gets out that she reported him, he will be notified through the*  
484 *athletic department and there would be charges - so he'd know which team it came from.*  
485 *They would know who it was and it would be really scary for her - that they would know*  
486 *who specifically she was. It would harm her more than it would harm him.” - Female*  
487 *Athlete, FGD participant*

489 Male athletes also felt a strong sense of loyalty to their team and to upholding its reputation,  
490 leading some to feel pressured to protect their teammates, even in a case of sexual violence.

491 *"I've heard that a lot of time, players won't say anything - if they know about a sexual*  
492 *assault - because they don't want to get him (their teammate) in trouble. They also don't*  
493 *want to get in trouble, themselves. They don't want to have their name in the news." -*  
494 *Male Athlete, IDI participant*

495 Some female athletes found it hard to acknowledge sexual assault as sexual assault when they  
496 knew the perpetrator, and sometimes empathized with the person who attacked them, trying to  
497 see the incident from his point of view. The quote below illustrates how one participant justified  
498 the assaulter's behavior and expressed concern about causing him harm.

499 *"It kinda hurt my life, but do I need to ruin yours because of it? Cause I know you, and I*  
500 *think there's sympathy - probably especially with people they know. 'They didn't mean to*  
501 *and they're my friend, and they misunderstood.'" Giving sympathy to their assaulter*  
502 *happens by the victim 'cause they know them.'" Female Athlete, IDI participant*

#### 504 **Perceptions of NCAA Programming for Campus Sexual Violence Response and Prevention**

505 To address and respond to sexual violence in NCAA sports programs, the Sport Science Institute  
506 of the NCAA developed the "Athletics Tool Kit for a Healthy and Safe Culture" (National  
507 Collegiate Athletic Association & Sport Science Institute, 2016) for implementation on all NCAA  
508 member campuses, including UCLA, UCSB and UCSD. In the 2018-2019 academic year, all  
509 three campuses attested to following the requirements of the NCAA Policy on Campus Sexual  
510 Violence. We asked participants to share their feelings on how well their campus did in  
511 demonstrating their commitments to engaging college leadership in sexual violence prevention  
512 and offering evidence-based educational programming. We did not investigate similar  
513 programming for club-level sports programs on the UC campuses.

#### 514 **NCAA's commitment to engaging college leadership in sexual violence prevention.**

515 The NCAA's first core commitment area to preventing sexual violence in intercollegiate sports is  
516 leadership and making violence prevention a priority for college presidents/chancellors, athletics  
517 directors, coaches, sports medicine personnel and other athletics stakeholders (National  
518 Collegiate Athletic Association & Sport Science Institute, 2016). Staff members, coaches in

519 particular, were keenly aware of their important role as active promoters of prosocial individual  
520 and culture change - on campus and within the lives of student-athletes.

521 *“It's my job – to help them become responsible adults. I mean, look, there's only so much*  
522 *basketball we can teach ... and the teaching part means you teach them about life. How to*  
523 *be a good person, how to be responsible, how to be a man of your word, how to be on*  
524 *time, how to compete, how to be a great teammate. You know, how to have empathy for*  
525 *others who aren't as fortunate as you. You're an elite athlete. We're less than 1% of the*  
526 *population, right? If they don't learn these things and they're around us for four years,*  
527 *what are we doing? I shouldn't be coaching. Right?” - Athletic Staff, IDI participant*

528 Student-athletes in leadership positions, such as team captain, are also required per NCAA  
529 guidelines to participate in formal training. Compared to the rest of the players, student leaders  
530 said they were exposed to more of what is going on among campus and athletic leadership, with  
531 regard to education and prevention. In theory, they are to pass these lessons along to their team.

532  
533 *“As a team captain, before the season we watch a video with the EDI (Equity, Diversity*  
534 *and Inclusion) Director and our coaches. It's an anti-hazing video but also encompasses*  
535 *anti-sexual assault and anti-sexual harassment and anti-harassment. I think in my*  
536 *position, where I've put myself as a leader in the program, I've seen a lot more of the*  
537 *preventative tactics that the school is putting forward.” - Female Athlete, IDI participant*

538 A noted gap in university leadership was a lack of evaluation of violence prevention efforts on  
539 campus. The National College Health Assessment (NCHA) is an NCAA-recommended research  
540 survey on student health habits, behaviors, and perceptions. Some participants had completed it  
541 during the prior year but none were aware of the results, demonstrating a missed opportunity for  
542 prevention education. Students and staff unanimously felt more should be done by the UC to  
543 develop and assess campus climate regarding sexual violence, overall and as it relates to  
544 athletics. When discussing why more research has not been done on the UC campuses, and how  
545 some leaders have expressed concerns about studies on violence, one participant said:

546  
547  
548 *“Quite frankly I don't understand why (some are concerned about research). Well I can*  
549 *understand it, but personally I don't understand what the concerns would be because*  
550 *sexual violence is a problem that needs to be addressed.... and the reason it's a problem*  
551 *that needs to be addressed is because we don't do things like research, which allows*  
552 *things to continue as is. To me, it's almost like research on racism, you know? A lot of*  
553

554 *people don't want to talk about those things and that's why we continue to have the issues*  
555 *we have - because we don't have that collection of information about some ideas to work*  
556 *on it and so forth.” -Athletic Staff, IDI participant*

558 **NCAA’s commitment to educational programming to change behaviors and cultures.**

559 The NCAA requires its member campuses to provide evidence-based educational programming,  
560 tailored to meet the needs of student-athletes and provided to all who directly influence student-  
561 athletes’ decision making and behaviors (e.g., coaches, athletics administrators, sports medicine  
562 staff, academic support personnel, faculty, family of student-athletes). Student-athletes recalled  
563 educational programming during orientation, team meetings and specially arranged sessions  
564 focused on distinct topics like substance abuse or the relationship between sexual violence and  
565 alcohol. Many indicated that they valued the positive intent of the UC education programming  
566 but felt it was devalued by athletes who saw it as one more obligation to take care of in their  
567 already limited time.

568 *“I feel there is really good information and the intent is there but people don't take it*  
569 *seriously - just because it's another thing we have to do.” Female Athlete, FGD*  
570 *participant*

571  
572  
573 Most emphasis in the athletic programs was said to be placed on having students complete brief,  
574 one-off trainings on how to understand consensual sex before a sexual encounter and on  
575 bystander intervention methodology. Athletes expressed authentic interest in learning more about  
576 relationship dynamics and sexual health and thought the NCAA training programs were a real  
577 start, but most felt the offerings availed to them were prescribed and inadequate.

578 *“I think (the training) was as helpful as a 6 minute video could be, but the idea of it is*  
579 *more like the NCAA is mandating that everybody gets this training. So it was like, ‘okay,*  
580 *let’s meet the requirement and check the box,’ but it wasn't sufficient.” - Male Athlete,*  
581 *FGD participant*

583 Student-athletes, especially women, felt the NCAA education on negative language choices and  
584 their adverse impact on team culture was ineffective, or was not provided at all as some

585 participants were unaware of this programming. Many female athletes noted there was ongoing  
586 use of misogynistic and demeaning language in the sports system.

587  
588 *“Their entire team (referring to one of the NCAA men’s teams), as a whole, makes sexist*  
589 *comments. They're not perfect little boys. They are college men and they cross the line in*  
590 *other ways too.” -Female Athlete, IDI participant*

591 Staff also recognized a need for prevention education to be more comprehensive and revised to  
592 be more survivor-centered. Current approaches - particularly those offered as brief training  
593 modules, followed by comprehension quizzes - were thought by many to be lacking in their  
594 ability to cultivate a true understanding, compassion and empathy.

595  
596  
597 *“Do the tests make you understand how the victim feels or anything close to it?*  
598 *Absolutely not. Of course not. I'm a man. Do most men understand what it's like to walk*  
599 *in a woman's shoes to feel that fear and all that? No. That's like saying, do most men*  
600 *understand what it's like to have a baby. No. Can there be a lot better understanding?*  
601 *Absolutely. I know guys that have daughters are a little more sensitive to it, and also if*  
602 *they have wives. Sometimes they could be [more understanding] but taking a test will not*  
603 *change anything.” -Athletic Staff, IDI participant*

604  
605 Most staff only recalled completing the NCAA’s online training program which was available  
606 for student-athletes as well. Student-athletes felt these sessions lacked authenticity and meaning  
607 and could be completed rapidly, without actually learning anything.

608  
609 *“People would scroll through (the online program) and be like, ‘whoa!’ Like it was a*  
610 *joke. ...it was just very cringy kind of... I think it was well intended, but it wasn't the best*  
611 *way to convey it. And no one did it and then we got to the last day and our coaches were*  
612 *like, ‘This is a list of everyone who hasn't checked off that they've watched the video.*  
613 *Please do it by the end of the day.’” -Female Athlete, FGD participant*

614  
615 A common reflection on the education provided through the athletic department - including both  
616 in-person and online offerings - was it reflected little thought from leadership and likely only  
617 served to achieve compliance with NCAA’s requirements. This was narrated by both students...

618  
619 *“Every single thing I see [about violence prevention] looks like they’re being forced to do*  
620 *it. It all looks like this is some kind of legal requirement from some other thing, like the*  
621 *government or the NCAA. Just nothing that looks like its actually, like there’s any real*  
622 *investment in it, other than a liability dodge.” -Male Athlete, FGD participant*

623  
624 ...and athletic department staff members:

625  
626 *“They did this out of CYA, which means ‘cover your ass.’ All University of California*  
627 *campuses have to take this online training about sexual assault and about these types of*  
628 *things. It's about an hour. It's taken online and you know that's what everybody has to*  
629 *do. That's what I call a CYA fix.” Athletic Staff 2, IDI participant*

631 Students said they thought the education was supposed to promote prevention of sexual violence  
632 but felt that most measures used by the UC were “reactionary,” not preventative. One-off  
633 trainings, lack of participatory approaches that offer iterative platforms for learning, and the  
634 provision of basic contact information for campus sexual assault centers (referred to as CARE  
635 offices at the UC) and the school-wide Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) were  
636 perceived as “bandaid” approaches to claim compliance with the Department of Education and  
637 maintain NCAA membership status.

638  
639 *“I think the UC’s entire preventative measures can be summed up as ‘too little, too late’*  
640 *because they DO have CAPS and CARE and stuff like that, but it’s like - we don’t even*  
641 *know what they do. So like, having these [measures] is too little, and it’s only after the*  
642 *fact.” -Male Athlete, FGD participant*

#### 644 **College Athletic Programs as a Platform for Sexual Violence Prevention**

645 Intercollegiate athletics are one of the most well established systems on many college and  
646 university campuses and hold promise for serving as a platform to prevent sexual violence  
647 among athletes and the larger campus community. Coach-led interventions are widely promoted  
648 and implemented to work toward these goals but participants expressed strong reservations about  
649 the acceptability and effectiveness of student-athletes turning to their coaches for guidance on  
650 healthy sexual experiences and intimate relationships. Both athletes and coaches were fully  
651 comfortable with an approach of working together on developing positive team relationships and  
652 athletic and academic competency. On the contrary, the head coach-athlete relationship was seen  
653 as unacceptable for addressing personal issues, unless absolutely necessary. Coaches recognized  
654 and understood that their student-athletes almost always only wanted them to see their best side.  
655

656 *"I oftentimes am the decision-maker of their playing time, which can skew the*  
657 *relationship a little bit. They tend to get a little closer to the assistant coaches. For*  
658 *instance, when we drive the vans at the airport, it's a mad dash to get into the one with*  
659 *the assistant coach. The last couple of stragglers get into my van. There is a separation*  
660 *there and I think there needs to be. And there's more of a separation during the fall*  
661 *season because that's kind of when the results really are the emphasis of what we do....*  
662 *I've always thought that I'm a fairly approachable guy, but much more so out of season*  
663 *than in season. In season is hard. My one assistant especially, is the most approachable*  
664 *guy, in season."* -Athletic Staff, IDI participant

665 Almost all student-athletes felt wary of sharing non-sports information about their lives with  
666 their coaches. It felt uncomfortable and inappropriate and students believed it was also awkward  
667 for the coaches - thinking they, too, would rather avoid knowing about student problems.

668  
669 *"I feel like most coaches would be scared for their athletes to come out and admit*  
670 *something out of fear that that could either ruin the face of the athletic department and*  
671 *they wouldn't want any scandals, so I feel like they'd usually rather sweep it under the*  
672 *rug, just to avoid any problems."* -Male Athlete, FGD participant

673  
674 Athletes said they would not feel comfortable confiding in their coaches about sexual violence.

675  
676  
677 *"If I were [sexually assaulted]....I probably wouldn't go to my coaches, not because*  
678 *they're not supportive but I just wouldn't feel as comfortable talking about that personal*  
679 *of a topic with them."* -Female Athlete, FGD participant

680 Assistant coaches were felt to be better placed than head coaches to help student-athletes handle  
681 or avoid relationship-level problems in their lives. Instead, students unanimously stated a  
682 preference for peer-to-peer mentorship frameworks. Athletes felt more comfortable interacting  
683 with their peers, overall, and particularly when it came to addressing intimate details about their  
684 lives, let alone a potentially traumatizing event such as sexual violence. Student-athletes said  
685 they prefer receiving guidance from other student-athletes, because their shared generational and  
686 athletic experiences cultivate stronger feelings of comfort and safety - to disclose information,  
687 ask questions, and receive meaningful feedback.

688  
689  
690 *"In my experiences with our coaches, they haven't given us any strong guidance in terms*  
691 *of matters that really pertain to our lives and have really serious implications, aside from*  
692 *the scope of "Hey, study" and "Don't do stupid shit!" With a situation like sexual assault,*  
693 *it would be very meaningful to have members, like for example, within the scope of*



694 *athletics, members of a team, for example, speaking out on this type of stuff.” -Male*  
695 *Athlete, FGD participant*  
697 Student-Athlete Mentor (SAMs) programs were seen as a successful way to provide help and  
698 support to other athletes - through education, raising awareness, and promoting healthy lifestyles.  
699 The SAM approach was implemented for first year players on one of the study campuses and  
700 both the athletes and staff members felt strongly about its positive impact.

701  
702 *“We have a [peer] mentoring program just for our freshmen. So we require our freshmen*  
703 *to be in it because it's a transitional thing plus it's a way for us to monitor their academic*  
704 *performance, as well. So they meet with their mentors once a week ... we think it's a*  
705 *resource we really have to take advantage of.” -Athletic Staff, IDI participant*  
707 Some student-athletes said peer mentors might be preferred over formal services on campus.

708 *“We had a girl on our team who had been sexually assaulted in high school. She told our*  
709 *team openly about it and I think our coaches know about it too. I think she went to CAPS*  
710 *and said she's getting help but I feel like if someone on our team were to experience*  
711 *sexual assault and they know she has already been through, she would definitely be a*  
712 *person our team members would approach... I feel like it's better going to someone who*  
713 *is your same age and plays the same sport. There are so many similarities. I feel like that*  
714 *would make me more comfortable.” -Female Athlete, FGD participant*

716 Team captains, in particular, were thought to be ideal mentors for raising awareness, modeling  
717 prosocial behaviors and offering guidance on how to have healthy relationships.

718  
719 *“I'm pretty sure if the team captain said something like ‘sexual assault is a problem and*  
720 *we need to make sure we all have the same mentality towards this type of issue,*  
721 *particularly if we're going to be partying or if people want to pursue avenues of sexual*  
722 *interactions with other people’ that would help. It's nice when it comes from somebody*  
723 *you have an intimate relationship with, telling you about these types of things. It needs to*  
724 *come from somebody there's a form of respect with. I feel like if a captain said a few*  
725 *words about that, that would be a good thing to do, a good way to educate people about*  
726 *these types of things.” -Male Athlete, FGD participant*

727  
728

### Discussion

729 Our research yields three main findings. First, student-athletes and athletic department staff  
730 members associated college sports participation with increased risk for sexual violence but felt  
731 the prevention education and response programs available to them through either the university  
732 or the NCAA failed to effectively address key issues at the root of this synergistic relationship.

733 The second main finding is that NCAA athletes felt academically and socially isolated from the  
734 larger campus community. This sense of a disconnection was perceived to contribute to  
735 increased rates of mental health problems among student-athletes, and decreased likelihood of  
736 their use of important campus resources (e.g., psychosocial and counseling services) and of  
737 reporting sexual violence. Lastly, despite widespread promotion and implementation of coach-  
738 led “character education” training for college athletes - on topics including bystander  
739 intervention, and relationship violence - student-athletes expressed discomfort with disclosing  
740 information to their coaches about their intimate sexual relationships.

741 Corroborating prior findings that sexual assault and harassment are often misunderstood by  
742 student-athletes and intercollegiate athletic department staff (Rahimi & Liston, 2009), our  
743 participants struggled to define these concepts. Athletes said that, apart from completing  
744 mandatory university and NCAA sexual violence prevention education training, they had never  
745 spent time assessing their understanding of the continuum of sexual violence, let alone what  
746 could be done to stop it. Participants referred to a previously coined “Checkbox Culture” in  
747 athletic departments that is limited to what is necessary to meet requirements set by their  
748 university, Title IX or the NCAA. Athletic departments provided referrals or resources when  
749 necessary without overtly supporting survivors (McCray, Sutherland, & Pastore, 2018). Building  
750 on previous studies (Long, Rahimi, & Liston, 2015; McCray et al., 2018), our findings imply a  
751 need for more nuanced sexual assault education that is tailored to meet the distinct needs of  
752 different genders and sports teams, and account for other key social determinants.

753 We suggest moving away from top-down decision-making and program implementation, and  
754 toward student-led approaches that encourage critical thought, opportunities for open-discussion  
755 and emergent problem solving techniques. Student-athletes should not only be participants, but

756 leaders in all efforts to design, implement and refine programs and policies related to sexual  
757 violence prevention and response on campus and in athletic departments. Including student  
758 voices in research, as we have done in our study, is informative but it is not enough. We argue  
759 that university administrators and athletic/academic leaders also need to begin radically listening  
760 to student-athletes and responding to their suggestions on their own education and outreach  
761 needs. Students consistently reported that sporadic, one-off trainings that provide general  
762 awareness-raising or one-way instructional messaging on consensual sexual encounters do not  
763 succeed in educating athletes on consent, survivors services or intervention approaches. It is time  
764 for university and college leadership to listen to and really hear what student-athletes are saying,  
765 and respond with meaningful change.

766 We would benefit from borrowing lessons from the global field of violence against women  
767 prevention programming and research. Decades of experience reveals that effective  
768 transformation requires focusing on violence more broadly (i.e., not only as it relates to sports),  
769 and coordinating systems to promote insightful reflection on sexual assault and harassment as  
770 public health problems and to ensure critical connections are made (i.e., between athletes and the  
771 overarching campus community) (Michau, Horn, Bank, Dutt, & Zimmerman, 2015). NCAA  
772 athletes described their lives as so narrowly focused on their sport that they felt disconnected  
773 from the campus community around them. This isolation was often compounded by a strong pull  
774 from athletic departments for athletes to turn to internal resources of support (e.g., student-athlete  
775 tutors) and to their coaches for guidance on personal problems. Student-athletes expressed  
776 discomfort, however, with the idea of sharing details about their sexual experiences and intimate  
777 relationships with coaches. Athletes were loosely aware of sexual violence and mental health  
778 resources on the broader campus with female student-athletes demonstrating significantly more

779 knowledge than males. Most student-athletes in our study showed reluctance to use available  
780 resources because of limited time, and concerns that seeking assistance outside of the athletic  
781 department would cause more problems than benefit. To understand prevalence and risk factors  
782 for sexual violence victimization and perpetration, as well as barriers and facilitators to service  
783 utilization among student-athletes, we recommend representative, quantitative research for  
784 measuring these estimates. Our qualitative research does suggest, however, that strong loyalty to  
785 the sports system served as a barrier to athletes' willingness to seek assistance for services and,  
786 for female athletes, to report perpetrators of violence, particularly if the abuser was also within  
787 the athletic system.

788 Student-athletes provided other important recommendations for improving sexual violence  
789 education programs and resources on campus. Participants from both men's and women's teams  
790 felt stronger connections with their teammates and team captains than with any of their coaches.  
791 Athletes requested that programming be redesigned so other athletes are able to lead systems  
792 change efforts focused on understanding and preventing sexual violence and addressing its  
793 intersections with salient issues such as alcohol related concerns. A small liberal arts college  
794 study recently found exposure to bystander training that addressed heavy drinking increased  
795 athlete's prosocial bystander behaviors and decreased high-risk alcohol use (Morean et al.,  
796 2018). This type of approach warrants pilot-testing for feasibility and impact on large campuses  
797 like those in our study. Students and staff alike felt the university should put more resources into  
798 increasing staffing in the counseling and sexual violence service offices, and efforts should be  
799 placed on better coordinating targeted programming for student-athletes so they feel more  
800 connected.

801 While our study informs gaps in current sexual violence prevention efforts through in-depth  
802 analysis of student-athletes', coaches' and administrators' perspectives, there are limitations worth  
803 noting. First, our findings are likely not generalizable to all NCAA sports and the student-  
804 athletes who play them – both on our three study campuses and across the UC system and  
805 beyond. This is because our sample was small and lacked representation from athletes and staff  
806 from all of the NCAA sports teams at UCLA, UCSD and UCSB. Most notably missing from our  
807 pool of participants were football players, the athletes most commonly accused of perpetrating  
808 sexual assault on college and university campuses (Wiersma-Mosley & Jozkowski, 2019).  
809 Further, while 2 men's basketball players participated in a focus group, we largely lacked  
810 representation from male student-athletes who played other than football and basketball contact,  
811 team-sports where aggression is common including hockey, lacrosse, wrestling, etc. Research  
812 has found that boys and men who play these heavy-contact sports are significantly more likely to  
813 perpetrate sexual assault, physical violence and psychological aggression, relative to players of  
814 non-contact, individual sports such as cross country (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Pakalka, & White,  
815 2006; Trebon, 2007). Despite extensive efforts to engage male student-athletes and their coaches  
816 in our study, we were commonly met with non-response and/or declined participation. Receiving  
817 endorsement of our study from NCAA leadership and university athletic directors facilitated  
818 enrolment of participants, but these endorsements and their benefits were limited. Some athletic  
819 leaders seemed reluctant to participate or have their staff and students get involved in our  
820 research due to concerns about how the information they shared with us would be portrayed or  
821 disseminated to the public. These worries seemed amplified as a result of both high profile  
822 scandals and negative local news stories in the media over the past few years, involving NCAA  
823 players, coaches and directors. We tried to mitigate these concerns by providing detailed

824 information on how our public health research aimed to minimize bias that can occur in data  
825 collection, analysis and reporting. Nonetheless, it took an extensive amount of effort and time to  
826 involve participants from the athletic departments and we were unsuccessful in recruiting more  
827 players and staff from the most popular and highest revenue-generating sports at UCLA  
828 (football), UCSD (men's basketball) and UCSB (men's basketball). These shortcomings limit  
829 our ability to make between- or within-group inferences from our findings, and to speak to the  
830 perspectives of the most highly valued and prestigious and possibly most violent student-athletes  
831 on our campuses. An ideal future research design would use stratified sampling methods to  
832 ensure equal representation of student-athletes from men's and women's teams and non-contact  
833 individual and contact team-level sports. Also important would be ensuring participation of  
834 athletes from the most popular and highest revenue-earning sports.

835 Because our research was conducted on three, large public university system campuses, our  
836 findings should be interpreted with caution when considering their applicability to the culture at  
837 smaller schools and/or private institutions. Further, this assessment was a sub-study of a larger  
838 project focused on overarching perspectives on sexual and intimate relationships and campus  
839 environment related to relationship health. As such, the IDI and FGD guides we used were  
840 developed for broader discussion and were not created specifically for examination of violence  
841 within sports culture. Thus, sports specific probing was not uniformly enforced or outlined,  
842 potentially missing important nuances and findings. Lastly, some participants did not feel  
843 comfortable providing us with their complete demographic information in the pre-interview /  
844 pre-focus group survey. This resulted in an incomplete dataset on participants' identifying  
845 characteristics, such as age, race and ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity and orientation. This  
846 precludes our ability to understand potentially important differences between participants and

847 examine how student-athletes from historically marginalized populations experience and  
848 perceive sexual violence. We believe, however, that ensuring confidentiality and offering the  
849 option of anonymity are critical when conducting research on highly sensitive topics, such as  
850 sexual violence, in a such close community.

851 Despite the small scale of this study, we feel the findings are important and actionable,  
852 providing insights into some changes that can be made immediately, such as bringing student-  
853 athletes to the forefront of program and policy reform. This study highlights student-athletes'  
854 needs, concerns, and reasons for not seeking care which could inform student engagement and  
855 participation efforts. We intend to use what we have learned from this study to guide next steps  
856 in research on the UC campuses and hope our results might help others think through future  
857 prevention and response efforts on their own campuses.

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<b>Table 1. Participant characteristics of 51 student-athlete and 9 staff member participants from UCLA, UCSB and UCSD</b>				
	<b>Campus</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	
<b>Student-athletes by campus (n=51)</b>	UCLA	13	26%	
	UCSB	18	35%	
	UCSD	20	39%	
<b>Athletic staff members by campus (n=9)</b>	UCLA	3	33%	
	UCSB	2	22%	
	UCSD	4	45%	
<b>Number of NCAA (n=47) and club (n=4) athletes by type of sport (n=13)</b>				
<b>Sport</b>	<b>NCAA men</b>	<b>NCAA women</b>	<b>Club athletes</b>	<b>% of sample by sport</b>
Soccer	3	8	0	22%
Volleyball	3	7	0	20%
Water polo	1	6	0	14%
Basketball	2	4	0	12%
Swimming	0	3	2	10%
Rowing	0	3	0	6%
Fencing	2	0	0	4%
Baseball	1	0	0	2%
Tennis	0	2	0	4%
Softball	0	1	0	2%
Track and field	0	1	0	2%
Rugby	0	0	1	2%
Sailing	0	0	1	2%