

**Exploring the Impact of Organizational Communication on Athletes who have Experienced
Interpersonal Violence in Sport Using a Trauma-informed Approach**

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Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Human Kinetics

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Abstract

Researchers have begun analyzing the types of public responses sport organizations issue following interpersonal violence (IV) cases (Frederick et al., 2021; Meadows & Meadows, 2020); however, their impact on the athletes who experience them has not been systematically explored. Similarly, the impact of internal communications and organizational silence following an IV case remains unexplored. In this thesis, written in the publishable paper format, I took a first step toward addressing these gaps by exploring the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced IV in sport. To do so, I conducted a narrative inquiry, that included narrative interviews with eight athletes who experienced IV. Importantly, throughout the design and execution of this study, I paid particular attention to implementing a trauma-informed research approach to reduce the likelihood of participant re-traumatization and enhance research quality. In the first paper, I drew on critical feminist theory to inform a thematic narrative analysis of the data. Using this approach, I developed a realist tale that sheds light on some of the tangible impacts organizational communications can have on athletes following cases of IV. Through the analysis of participant stories, I showcased some of the ways in which organizational communication can cause harm. In the second paper, I used situational crisis communication theory to inform a thematic narrative analysis, developed six considerations for crisis communicators, and used creative nonfiction to craft a short story that represents an idealized experience of organizational communication based on participants' perspectives. Additionally, I argued that athlete well-being should be considered alongside reputational impact when developing crisis communication responses after cases of IV. These papers may be used by crisis communicators and sport administrators to inform the development of athlete-centred communication efforts following IV cases. This thesis contains contributions

to theory and practice that have the potential to improve the experiences of athletes who have undergone IV in sport.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the participants of this study. You were forced to be brave during your time in sport, and you chose to continue being brave, whether by coming forward with complaints, advocating for storytelling, working to make sport a safer place, or participating in this study. You all inspired me immensely and have left me with a renewed sense of purpose. Thank you for your time, your bravery, and for sharing so much of yourselves with me. This work is for you, and for anyone else whose story was not given the care it deserved.

Acknowledgments

To Sommer, thank you for all your support these past two years. I started this degree unsure of my academic abilities and with no intention of staying in academia past this degree. Your guidance, kindness, and reassurance have strengthened my confidence and helped me find my footing in a brand-new space. You gave me a safe space to try things, encouraged me to grow, and made sure I knew I was never alone. I now leave this degree with a newfound passion for research and bigger dreams than I have ever had – largely thanks to you. I do not doubt that you will go on to inspire and empower countless more students, and I sincerely hope that we continue to cross paths and collaborate for years to come.

To Dr. Giles, thank you for all the care and attention you give your students – it is truly like nothing I would have ever expected. Thank you for seeing something in me, and for taking the time to tell me about it. That seemingly small act has already had a huge impact on me. You have taught me so much in these two short years, and I am immensely grateful.

To Dr. Bodin, thank you for joining my thesis advisory committee before you even officially started your job at the University. Your feedback and direction have been tremendously helpful, and your warmth has been a wonderful addition to my thesis journey.

To all the athletes and former athletes who took part in this study, I cannot thank you enough. You all shared your stories with a generosity and vulnerability that I admire profoundly. You have all been through so much and selflessly chose to rehash it and share your stories with me; any impact this work has would not have been possible without you. Thank you. Also, please know that I see you, and that you did not deserve any of the hardships you went through. You deserved to be safe, to be believed, and to be heard. Lastly, thank you for helping make my first research experience so positive and fulfilling. This experience and all of you have changed me for the better.

To my husband Jon, thank you for showing me that unconditional love and support really can be unconditional. Thank you for believing in me more than I ever thought someone could believe in another person. Thank you for putting aspects of our life on hold so that I could pursue these newfound dreams, without ever making me feel like anything was being sacrificed. Thank you for doing every single batch of dishes while I wrote this thesis. I promise that I might start helping out with that one day soon. Thank you for making me the star in your story. Please know that you are the sun in mine.

To all my friends and family, thank you for your continued support. If every graduate student felt as supported and loved as I did, they would probably all want to stay in school forever.

Chapter One: Introduction

When a complaint alleging interpersonal violence (IV), which is the deliberate use of force or power to cause harm (Krug, 2002), is submitted to an organization, administrators and leaders must make many rapid decisions. Among these decisions, they must consider how they will communicate with various affected parties (e.g., complainants, respondents, other athletes, staff, and the public). This communication has the potential to escalate a crisis (Grebe, 2013) and to traumatize or re-traumatize target audiences (Place et al., 2023). Consequently, crisis managers must understand the potential impact of their communications and how to reduce the associated risks.

Although crisis communication researchers have begun to explore the public's reactions to various communication strategies within and outside of sport (e.g., Brown et al., 2020), few studies have examined organizational communication during an IV case in sport. Moreover, the impact of these communications on those directly affected has not been systematically explored. Therefore, in these studies, I aimed to explore the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced IV following an IV-related complaint. As such, I developed the following research questions: (1) How do athletes who have experienced IV describe their experiences with, and the impact of, sport organizations' communication practices following an IV-related complaint?; and (2) How do athletes who have experienced IV describe the communication they wanted to receive from their sport organization following an IV-related complaint? To answer these questions, I conducted two narrative studies, which I approached from a constructivist epistemology. I conducted narrative interviews with eight participants, which were then analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. I used the principles of a trauma-informed approach (TIA), situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), and critical feminist theory (CFT) to guide this paper. In paper one, I used narrative themes constructed as a realist

tale to showcase athletes' actual experiences, whereas in paper two, I developed six narrative themes that can serve as considerations for communicators, and represented what could be considered an ideal experience through a short story written using creative nonfiction.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I will examine the current state of IV in sport by examining definitions, prevalence, policy, and prevention measures. I will then discuss the Canadian sport context, followed by crisis communication theories and their application within and outside of sport. The term *organizational communication* will be used throughout this thesis to describe any type of communication undertaken by organizations, including informal, internal, and external communications (Baker, 2008), both in and out of crisis contexts. The thesis also draws on the concept of *crisis communication*, which Coombs (2010b) defines as “the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation” (p. 20). As allegations of IV generally place sport organizations in crisis, their communication strategies are typically informed by crisis communication principles.

Qualifying Safe Sport and IV

An early focus of safe sport research was defining safe sport and its associated concepts. Several research papers have centred on the development of accurate definitions and frameworks (e.g., Gurgis et al., 2023; Park et al., 2024; Stirling, 2008); however, inconsistencies in terminology and definitions persist, resulting in a complicated and contested landscape (Park et al., 2024). Park and colleagues (2024) argued that this complexity is one of the main reasons that progress in preventing IV in sport has been slow. Recognizing this challenge, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) developed a consensus statement regarding IV and safeguarding in sport (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). Tuakli-Wosornu and colleagues (2024) conducted a scoping

review, engaged in expert consultations, and formed expert working groups to develop definitions of safeguarding and IV in sport. I chose to use the definitions and recommendations outlined in the IOC's consensus statement throughout this project because they were developed from a broad scope of literature, incorporated athletes' voices, and were designed to be internationally applicable (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

In line with the IOC's consensus statement, I consider *safe sport* to be “a physically and psychologically safe and supportive athletic environment where participants can thrive and experience the full benefits of sport participation” (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024, p. 1323). In contrast, *safeguarding* refers to proactive efforts to prevent and respond to harassment and abuse in sport (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). The term interpersonal violence is used throughout this document to refer to “intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (Krug, 2002, p. 5). Tuakli-Wosornu and colleagues (2024) recommend using IV rather than *abuse*, *violence*, or *maltreatment*, all of which have been used in the existing literature, as it is globally recognized and accepted by reputable international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO). Krug's (2002) definition encompasses psychological violence, physical violence, sexual violence, and deprivation/neglect. Despite slight differences in terminology, these four types of IV are consistently highlighted in safe sport literature (e.g., Parent & Fortier, 2018; Kerr et al., 2019; Stirling, 2008). Safe sport research extends beyond its definition and framing, much of which will be explored in the following sections of this thesis.

Existing Knowledge of Safe Sport and IV

The number of studies on the prevalence of IV in sport has increased significantly since 2020. In these studies, reported rates of IV in sport range from 44% to 86% (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). Within this growing body of research, sexual violence is the most well-documented type of abuse in sport and has been found to affect girls, women, and Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and additional people who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities (2SLGBTQI+) at higher rates than boys and men (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). Similarly, some studies suggest that psychological violence affects disabled and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals at higher rates than boys and men (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). At the same time, physical violence appears to be more prevalent among male athletes, athletes in team sports, 2SLGBTQI+ athletes, and athletes who train for more than 16 hours a week (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). In particular, sport has been documented as an exclusionary environment for sexuality and gender diverse individuals (Storr et al., 2022), with 2SLGBTQI+ athletes experiencing higher rates of IV and with lesbian, gay, and bisexual athletes experiencing homophobia in sport at rates of 41.6% (Denison et al., 2020). Much of the existing research on IV in sport has largely focused on elite-level sport, where pressure (Salim & Winter, 2022), normalization of harmful behaviours (Salim & Winter, 2022), closeness in the coach-athlete relationship (Salim & Winter, 2022; Stirling & Kerr, 2009), and high levels of power held by coaches (Stirling & Kerr, 2009) in the coach-athlete relationships have been found to contribute to IV. However, emerging evidence suggests a more complex picture across levels of sport, as research on sexual violence in recreational sport indicates that recreational-level athletes report higher rates of sexual violence than elite athletes (Sølvberg et al., 2022).

Policy has also been a focus of recent safe sport research (e.g., Baker et al., 2025; Bennett et al., 2026; Gurgis et al., 2026; McRae et al., 2024; Park et al., 2026; Ritondo et al., 2025).

Following the IOC's publication of guidelines for international federations and national Olympic committees on creating and implementing policies to safeguard athletes from harassment and abuse in sport (IOC, 2016), numerous organizations implemented policies to address IV in sport. Consequently, research has shifted to critiquing, evaluating, and calling for improvements to existing policy.

Notably, scholars have criticized the one-size-fits-all approach to safe sport policies, which does not account for the unique ways individuals experience IV in sport (e.g., Baker et al., 2025; McRae et al., 2024; Ritondo et al., 2025). Specifically, the experiences of women (Baker et al., 2025; Ritondo et al., 2025), 2SLGBTQI+ people (Gurgis et al., 2022; Ritondo et al., 2025), pregnant and parenting elite athletes (Ritondo et al., 2025), people experiencing disability (Gurgis et al., 2022), racialized athletes (Gurgis et al., 2022), and Indigenous Peoples (McRae et al., 2025) appear to be lacking from existing policies. Baker and colleagues (2025) suggested that commitments to safe sport should consider how gender and other intersecting aspects of sport participants' identities shape their experiences of sport, and therefore, which elements of safeguarding are most beneficial to their unique needs. While gender equity is typically addressed in sport policy, it is often limited to efforts required for equitable gender representation in sport and broad issues relating to women and girls' participation, while efforts that promote positive participation and safety for women, 2SLGBTQI+ people and pregnant or parenting individuals are missing (Ritondo et al., 2025).

Policies also tend to emphasize children and youth as victims of IV, thus not addressing the ways IV can impact adults (Ritondo et al., 2025). Regarding the visibility of Indigenous

athlete experiences in sport policy, McRae and colleagues (2024) found that the experiences of Indigenous Peoples were not clearly separated or considered in safe sport policies, nor was anti-Indigenous racism addressed. National sport organization staff included in the study were concerned about challenges and barriers to implementing Indigenous-specific policies, including the view that creating Indigenous-focused policies would require a shift towards policies that cater to each racial and ethnic group, which they did not perceive as feasible (McRae et al., 2024). When examining coaches' perspectives on child safeguarding policies in youth sport, Bennett and colleagues (2026) found that two-thirds of participants were aware of existing safeguarding policies, about 40% believed the policies helped their coaching, and about 27% believed more policies were required. An almost equal number felt that no further policies were required. The participants in this study raised concerns about policy clarity. They suggested that they did not need more policies, but rather a better understanding of how to apply them within their daily training environments (Bennett et al., 2026). In general, policy reviews raised challenges accessing reporting and support systems (Baker et al., 2025), a lack of institutional accountability, including how organizations will act in the case of policy violation (Baker et al., 2025), insufficient enforcement and sanctioning of policies (Gurgis et al., 2026; McRae et al., 2024), and inconsistent and incomplete adoption of policies (Gurgis et al., 2026) as areas of concern. These reviews, however, do not appear to have included communications policies.

Beyond prevalence and policy, the prevention of IV in sport has also been explored in recent safe sport literature. Before many safe sport policies were in place, researchers began exploring methods to prevent IV in sport. In 2011, Parent and Demers examined measures to prevent sexual abuse in sport and found that few measures existed, and that those that were in place were negatively affected by factors such as interest-holder trivialization of prevention

methods, fear of false allegations, and lack of resources and training. Much has changed since this early study, but many of the shortcomings persist. In more recent studies, a lack of multi-level prevention measures or measures that targeted the intrapersonal, interpersonal and organizational levels of sport (Milroy et al., 2022; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022), insufficient measures that target children, and a discrepancy between policy and practice (Milroy et al., 2022) were raised as barriers to preventing IV. Owusu-Sekyere and colleagues (2022) demonstrated the benefits of positive safeguarding cultures in preventing IV in sport. These cultures are characterized by integrating safeguarding efforts into all aspects of sport, making it second nature. The findings from that study suggest that strong safety management systems, effective communication, leadership commitment, and interest-holder engagement are essential pillars of a safeguarding culture.

Safe Sport in Canada

In Canada, the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport (UCCMS; Sport Integrity Canada, n.d.) sets out rules for preventing and addressing maltreatment in sport. Sport organizations that receive funding from the Government of Canada are required to adopt these rules, which also outline a list of prohibited behaviours (Sport Integrity Canada, 2026). Violations of the UCCMS within signatory organizations (i.e., nationally funded programs) are reported to and managed by Sport Integrity Canada through the Canadian Safe Sport Program (Sport Integrity Canada, n.d.). In contrast, although other sport organizations, such as provincial sport organizations and university sport programs, are encouraged to adopt and abide by the UCCMS, they are not required to do so. Consequently, Sport Integrity Canada does not have jurisdiction over these organizations and cannot hold them accountable for violations of the Code. Limited uptake beyond nationally funded sport organizations (Mazzucco

& Findlay, 2024), combined with the absence of standardized policies across the sport system, makes it difficult to assess how non-government-funded organizations prevent and respond to IV. A recent review of 39 Canadian university websites found large discrepancies among schools. These discrepancies included implementation of the UCCMS, the presence of other IV-related policies, reporting systems, and complaint management pathways (Gurgis et al., 2026). Only two of the 39 universities in this study fully adopted the UCCMS and recognized all of its prohibited behaviours, while 11 schools made only partial references to the Code (Gurgis et al., 2026). Most Canadian universities lack clear reporting mechanisms, and sanctions appear to be applied inconsistently, with no universities aligning with all suggested approaches to sanctioning outlined in the UCCMS (Gurgis et al., 2026). To the best of my knowledge, policies that directly address the role of organizational communication and its potential impact on athlete survivors do not exist in Canada.

Canadian athletes do not appear to be satisfied with the current state of Canadian sport. Studies centring athletes' voices and perspectives on safe sport in Canada have identified several factors that contribute to the high prevalence of IV, including the normalization and prioritization of harmful behaviours (e.g., being called obese, talentless, replaceable, and being told not to eat), an emphasis on winning over development, athlete's reluctance to speak out due to a fear of reprisal, and insufficient attention to equity-owed groups (Wilson et al., 2022). These athletes suggested several measures to improve the sport experience of Canadian athletes, including enhanced education for coaches and administrators, greater emphasis on holistic athlete development, a review of current funding models that are based on medals, a zero-tolerance approach towards coach-athlete romantic relationships, and mandating independent complaint processes (Wilson et al., 2022). Although the prevention of harmful behaviours in sport was

beyond the scope of this thesis, I examined the impact of crisis communication on athletes who experienced IV in sport to better understand how organizational communication may contribute to harm and how that harm might be reduced. While safe sport research and the practical prevention and management of IV in sport have expanded tremendously in recent years, some aspects of what an athlete who has experienced IV in sport goes through remain unexplored. Specifically, the aim of this study is to explore the impact of organizational communications, which typically occur after an athlete has experienced IV in sport. In the following pages of this thesis, I will highlight some existing research relevant to this topic by discussing crisis communications and crisis communications in sport.

Crisis Communications

From the 1980s to the present, crisis communication has evolved as both an organizational practice and an academic discipline (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). Crisis communication, which aims to prevent, reduce, or repair damage and maintain operations, involves two main processes: crisis knowledge management and interest-holder reaction management (Coombs, 2010a). The first step involves collecting and processing the information managers need to make decisions; the second step involves using communication to shape interest-holders' reactions to a crisis (Coombs, 2010a). In practice, organizations often measure the success of these efforts in terms of their revenue and reputation (Coombs & Harker, 2021a). Part of the reason reputation is important to organizations is that a good reputation appeals to customers and investors and, in turn, affects revenue (Coombs & Harker, 2021a). Communication, therefore, plays a critical role during a crisis, as it can influence reputational damage and shape the crisis's outcome (Coombs & Harker, 2021a). Accordingly, crisis responses

should be consistent across channels, transparent, and timely (Coombs & Harker, 2021a).

According to Coombs & Harker (2021a):

Transparency refers to disclosing information to your stakeholders. Be sure to disclose all information that could affect stakeholders, especially anything related to their physical safety. If you know something that might hurt stakeholders, they need to know that information. (p. 156)

While timing can be challenging to control, releasing pre-drafted holding statements as details are gathered can support reputation management (Coombs & Harker, 2021a). Beyond this, a key component of crisis communication is helping people cope with the emotions and distress that crises bring (Coombs & Harker, 2021a).

While many types of crises, including political crises, environmental crises, and product recalls, have been examined in crisis communication research (An & Cheng, 2010), this thesis focuses on crisis communication in sport and on studies that explore survivors' perspectives on crisis communication. Several factors contribute to the distinct nature of crisis communication in sport, including the unpredictability of sporting environments (Semião Carmo Simpson et al., 2025), the tendency for sport crises to be more reputational than operational (Coombs, 2018; Coombs & Harker, 2021a), fan dynamics (Coombs & Harker, 2021a; Koerber & Zabara, 2017), the political economy of sport (Koerber & Zabara, 2017), and the impact on sponsors (Coombs & Harker, 2021a). Some authors have called for the development of sport-specific crisis communication models and, in certain cases, have developed their own (e.g., Knight et al., 2020; Semião Carmo Simpson et al., 2025). Despite these differences, understanding a crisis and its associated risks, and selecting responses based on situational analysis, are considered effective image repair approaches within and beyond sport contexts (Brown et al., 2020).

Two main crisis communication theories have been used to analyze responses to sport crises in recent years: image repair theory (IRT; Benoit, 1995) and situational crisis communication theory (SCCT; Coombs, 2007). In many cases, these theories have been applied to sport crises (e.g., Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Brown et al., 2020; Fortunato, 2008; Frederick et al., 2021; Pfahl & Bates, 2008). While IRT is descriptive and allows for the analysis and evaluation of crisis cases, SCCT is prescriptive and can be used to identify when crisis responses will or will not be effective (Harker & Coombs, 2022). Despite decades of research on sport crisis communication, there is limited research on crisis communication in the context of IV cases.

Communicating in the Context of IV in Sport

In a small number of cases, SCCT and IRT have been applied when organizations have publicly acknowledged the outcome of an IV case (e.g., Frederick et al., 2021). These studies feature post hoc evaluations of response strategies. Frederick and colleagues' (2021) study examined social media users' comments on posts related to Michigan State University's image repair efforts following the Larry Nassar Scandal. This study provided valuable insights as to how the public perceives crisis communication efforts following an IV-related case. In a crisis, reputational damage is a crisis communicator's primary concern (Sherrill, 2018). The purpose of this thesis is to shed light on an underrepresented group in sport crisis communication literature: the crisis survivors. To my knowledge, no study has examined IV survivors' perspectives on the communication strategies employed. While communication strategies used in the wake of safe sport issues have begun to be analyzed through a crisis communication lens, research focusing on survivors' experiences of these communications remains limited. To address this gap and to

situate this study at the intersection of safe sport and communications research, an in-depth examination of TIAs in research and their applicability to this project is outlined below.

Trauma and IV in Sport

Given that this study is largely centred on athletes' experiences of IV in sport, I chose to develop this study using a TIA. Before exploring TIAs, I will describe trauma and its connection to IV in sport. Trauma can be experienced through direct exposure to violence or indirect exposure, such as hearing about an act of violence (McMahon & McGannon, 2024). While experiencing or witnessing a negative event does not always lead to psychological or physical symptoms, it can impact individuals neurologically, physiologically, and psychologically (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). SAMHSA (2014) developed the following definition of trauma based on a review of existing definitions:

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. (p. 11)

Additionally, in alignment with the four types of IV, trauma is typically grouped into the following dimensions: physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect (Orij et al., 2023). Trauma can also be classified as acute trauma (i.e., typically resulting from one event), chronic (i.e., the result of repeated exposure to distressing events), or complex (i.e., brought on by exposure to multiple and varied traumatic events, often as a result of interpersonal relationships; Orij et al., 2023). Accordingly, I used SAMHSA's definition of trauma to inform this project, as it captures the broad spectrum of IV that can occur in sport contexts.

Interviewing trauma survivors can re-traumatize them (Isobel, 2021) or, conversely, empower them and contribute to their healing (Delker et al., 2020), depending on how the interview is conducted. This project is grounded in the understanding that experiencing IV in sport is likely to result in trauma, a perspective supported by existing research (e.g., McMahon et al., 2023). Acknowledging that IV experiences in sport are, for many, traumatic and that the research process itself can be traumatic allowed me to support research participants' well-being while simultaneously gathering high-quality research data (Crosby et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2023). This important acknowledgment informed my methodological choices, ensuring that the project aligns with SAMHSA's (2014) TIA. TIAs have been increasingly used in various professional settings (e.g., nursing, family therapy, adoption services, education) but are less commonly used in research settings (Isobel, 2021). In the following section, I will briefly describe the tenets of SAMHSA's (2014) TIA and explore how they can be applied to research.

The purpose of a TIA is to support processes that reduce the possibility of re-traumatization for all involved (SAMHSA, 2014). SAMHSA (2014) defined TIAs as follows:

A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to resist re-traumatization actively. (p. 9)

The authors of SAMHSA's TIA (2014) identified six key principles in their model: (1) safety, (2) trustworthiness and transparency, (3) peer support, (4) collaboration and mutuality, (5) empowerment, voice, and choice, and (6) cultural, historical, and gender issues. The key tenets of each principle and how they can be applied to research are outlined below.

Safety

Safety refers to efforts to ensure participants' physical and psychological well-being. Trauma survivors often perceive the world as unsafe (McMahon et al., 2023), making it essential to actively consider safety at every stage of the research process (Isobel, 2021). Researchers can enhance participants' sense of safety in multiple ways, such as allowing them to choose their pseudonyms for final reports and adding supportive signage in physical spaces (e.g., accessibility information and pride flags; Crosby et al., 2023). It is also important to consider where interviews will be conducted, as this can affect a participant's experience (McMahon et al., 2023). For example, some participants may prefer the predictability of online interviews (McMahon et al., 2023), while considerations such as privacy and clear exits are also important when selecting an interview space (Isobel, 2021). Furthermore, transparency about research goals, processes, and outcomes can also help build safety by reducing surprises (Papathomas et al., 2024). In alignment with this principle, researchers' well-being must also be safeguarded (Smith, 2024), which can be facilitated in a number of ways, including the development of a researcher self-care plan (Giles et al., 2024).

Trustworthiness and Transparency

When working with potentially vulnerable participants, the researcher should build trust by being transparent (Papathomas et al., 2024). Transparency can be fostered by clearly explaining how participants' stories will be used, prioritizing informed consent, using culturally sensitive language, and outlining the potential risks and procedures involved in the study (Crosby et al., 2023). For example, Papathomas and colleagues (2024) found that sharing discussion topics with participants prior to interviews enhanced participants' comfort and helped establish rapport before data collection began.

Peer Support

In a TIA, a peer refers to someone with lived experience of trauma (SAMHSA, 2014). In a research setting, this role may be fulfilled by a researcher who shares a similar lived experience, which can help establish rapport, trust, and a sense of collegiality (Moola & Krahn, 2024). Researchers may also encourage participants to bring a peer or support person to their interview, which can help reduce power imbalances between interviewer and interviewee(s) (Crosby et al., 2023). Whether peer support is provided by a research team member or a participant companion, it can foster a judgment-free zone where participants may feel more comfortable sharing (McMahon et al., 2023). Peer support has also been found to help individuals shift their narrative from victim to advocate and ease tension often associated with storytelling (Moola & Krahn, 2024).

Collaboration and Mutuality

Collaboration and mutuality highlight the importance of partnering with participants and reducing power dynamics wherever possible. Research co-design is a method frequently recommended to increase collaboration and mutuality (e.g., Crosby et al., 2023; Isobel, 2021). Co-design is used to disrupt typical roles and dynamics in researcher-participant relationships, which is important when working with disempowered populations (Isobel, 2021). Co-designing a study with individuals who have lived experiences of trauma is a good way to ensure that a trauma-informed (TI) lens is taken at all stages of the study (Isobel, 2021). Collaboration and mutuality can also be expressed in research settings by being open to feedback and by using the research results to benefit participants, such as sharing them with relevant organizations (Crosby et al., 2023).

Empowerment, Voice, and Choice

The emphasis on empowerment, voice, and choice highlights the importance of recognizing participants' strengths and believing in the ability of trauma survivors to heal and recover from trauma (SAMHSA, 2014). As researchers, it is important to recognize that trauma can be a unifying factor for people and encourage fostering empowerment, decision-making, sharing, choice provision, and collaborative goal setting (SAMHSA, 2014). In practice, this can be achieved by providing participants with opportunities to select meeting locations and times, choose which questions to answer, speak without interruption, guide conversations, take breaks, and end interviews at their discretion (Crosby et al., 2023).

Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

SAMHSA (2014) recommends looking beyond cultural stereotypes and biases, offering gender-responsive services, and incorporating practices that address the unique cultural, language, racial, and ethnic needs of the people we work with. Researchers should be knowledgeable about the cultural, language, literacy, historical, and gender issues experienced by their research participants (Crosby et al., 2023). They can also make efforts to assemble a diverse research team and let the participants choose their interviewer (Zehntner et al., 2024). When considering gender dynamics, researchers should avoid pathologizing or individualizing discourses and instead acknowledge the social, political, and power-based forces that shape gender relationships (Zehntner et al., 2024). Knowledge of existing safe sport and sport-crisis communication literature, as well as an understanding of what constitutes a TIA, was foundational to this project. The following pages in this chapter will outline how the study was conducted informed by this knowledge.

Epistemology

I approached this study from a constructivist perspective. Constructivism is characterized by a belief that humans construct meaning through their experiences and interpretations (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Constructivists emphasize the value of individual perspectives in constructing meaning (Crotty, 1998), a belief that is central to this thesis. In line with constructivism, the methods used in this project enabled me to acknowledge and prioritize the experiences of athletes who have experienced IV in sport, and to understand the impact of organizational communication on them. Consistent with this perspective, narrative inquiry, the methodology used for this project, is typically underpinned by epistemologies such as constructivism (Williams & Brighton, 2024).

In keeping with my constructivist epistemology, I acknowledge how my subjectivity and positionality shaped this project. I will therefore take a moment to introduce myself and reflect on my positionality as a researcher. First, I identify as a brown, able-bodied, cisgender woman of Guyanese and Irish descent. I competed in track and field for many years at the national and U SPORTS level, during which I witnessed and experienced IV in sport. Shortly after the end of my competitive career, my coach and a second coach from the same organization received sanctions and lifetime bans from coaching in Canada. My coach systematically sexually harassed, emotionally abused, and groomed many young women over decades. Excessive touching, coach-athlete trips to strip clubs, frequent skin calliper testing, shaming related to our sex lives, being told to eat “air sandwiches,” normalizing revealing uniforms for what the coach deemed “better” bodies, and choosing friends based on thinness were behaviours that were normalized in my daily training environment. Throughout my time as an athlete and into the present, I have witnessed the long-lasting impacts of his and other leaders’ misconduct on

generations of athletes. For some of us, it looked like an eating disorder; for others, it was poor self-confidence or fractured mental health. Our identities were rooted in maladaptive behaviours such as being thin, needing to have a six-pack, and being his favourite. Throughout and after the coach's dismissal, multiple organizations he was involved with released external-facing communications. For many of us, these published statements resulted in further distress and feelings of loneliness, vulnerability, misrepresentation, and anger. This situation also led many of us to distrust reporting systems. We felt taken advantage of, as individuals went to great emotional lengths to share their stories, only for intimate details of their lives to be posted online. I went on to work in sport communications, where, on multiple occasions, I was asked to craft communications for organizations following instances of IV in sports. In this role, I came to realize many of the challenges inherent to this process.

While these experiences tainted my athletic experience, they have inspired my career path and my research interests. Sharing my experience with work colleagues has led to small but meaningful changes to communication processes, while sharing it socially has played a significant role in my healing and sense of empowerment. I have also done considerable work to process these experiences and to identify where my biases lie. I share this not to suggest that I have eliminated or am free of bias, but to acknowledge its presence and recognize that, in this research, it can also serve as a source of strength. Accordingly, I believe that my lived experience makes me a well-suited researcher for this project, enabling me to work in a TI manner by acting as a supportive peer to participants (Moola & Krahm, 2024). I disclosed my experience of IV to participants upon meeting them to foster comfort, reduce feelings of judgment, and minimize power imbalances. I also remained conscious that not all individuals experience organizational communication in sport in the same way I have. I aimed to gather

multiple perspectives and produce a manuscript that would be helpful to survivors of IV in sport affected by organizational communications. While my subjectivity inevitably shaped my data collection and analysis, I engaged in reflexive journaling throughout the research process to mitigate the risk that my assumptions would lead to skewed interpretations. Lastly, I acknowledge the elements of social privilege I possess and that my role as a researcher inevitably resulted in a power imbalance with some study participants. I made several methodological choices to reduce this imbalance, continuously reflected on my position throughout and made procedural adjustments as needed to increase participants' comfort.

Theoretical Frameworks

For this research project, I used CFT to address the first research question, how athletes experience and are impacted by the communication practices of sport organizations following an IV-related complaint, and SCCT to explore the second research question, what communication approaches athletes describe wanting to hear following an IV-related complaint. Knowledge of both theories gave me the theoretical sensitivity to support the quality of my analysis and my ability to connect findings to both the existing literature and practice. For the first research question, CFT helped me interpret the results beyond the individual by considering the societal factors that inevitably influence an athlete's experience of organizational communication following an IV-related complaint. For the second research question, I used SCCT as a frame of reference to understand how the participants' preferred communication approaches could or could not be realistically applied in real-world contexts, and why they differ from what actually occurs. Both CFT and SCCT will be introduced in the following paragraphs. From there, CFT will be discussed in paper one in connection with the first research question, and in paper two, I will discuss SCCT as it pertains to the second research question. Finally, in the fourth chapter of

this thesis, I will return to these points to discuss how the findings from both papers relate to each other and further expand on the role theory played throughout this project.

CFT

While it is hard to pin down a single definition of critical feminism (Shaw, 2024), social change (Byerly, 2018; Shaw, 2024; Waldron, 2025), praxis (Byerly, 2018), and the examination of gender and power relations (Katsiampoura, 2024; Shaw, 2024; Waldron, 2025) are key focuses of CFT scholarship. Power is of particular interest to critical feminist theorists, who focus on both formal forms of power, such as laws, and power as it manifests informally in day-to-day interactions (Wood, 2015). For critical feminists, power permeates through systems, such as capitalism and misogyny (Coakley, 2017). CFT is also characterized by an interest in how women become empowered and, conversely, disempowered (Wood, 2015). In the context of this project, examining organizational communications through a CFT lens allowed me, as a researcher, to critically consider the role of power in survivors' communication experiences and to better understand their experiences of becoming empowered and disempowered.

While critical feminists are concerned with how gender ideology is constructed and how everyday actions and interactions change and contribute to it (Katsiampoura, 2024), researchers engaging with CFT extend their inquiry beyond questions of sex and gender. They are also concerned with the devaluation and oppression of any group that does not hold a dominant role in society (Wood, 2015). In this study, the participants did not hold dominant roles in their sporting environments, making it important to examine how power, systemic oppression, and other key tenets of CFT shaped their experiences.

More broadly, CFT necessitates the critical evaluation of current assumptions and norms (Krane & Prewitt-White, 2025). Researchers engaging with CFT are called upon to challenge

existing knowledge and systems that perpetuate oppression (Katsiampoura, 2024) and to propose ways forward and connect their work to practice. Multiple elements of CFT are well aligned with the epistemological stance and methodological choices I adopted throughout this project. First, CFT emphasizes the importance of producing knowledge that differs from that considered dominant (Waldron, 2025), which was achieved in this study through my intentional centring of athletes' perspectives to explore the impact of organizational communications rather than organizational perspectives. Second, a focus on athletes with lived experience of IV enabled the centring of harmed parties, another element of CFT (Prewitt-White, 2025). Third, the empowerment of the oppressed (Katsiampoura, 2024) and the recognition of multiple perspectives and truths (Prewitt-White, 2025) were supported by narrative interviews and a TIA to promote participant comfort and authenticity.

In the context of this study, CFT allowed me to deepen my understanding of athletes' experiences and how power, gender relations, and participants' identities as women in sport may have shaped their perceptions of organizational communications and, importantly, how they may have been perceived in their pursuit storytelling. Further, it shed light on some of the social shifts that may have occurred when these women stepped into the role of complainants, a role that fundamentally opposes much of the hegemonic masculinity favoured in sport. The use of CFT also challenged me not only to describe survivors' experiences of organizational communications but also to consider how they might be improved.

SCCT

Timothy Coombs, who developed SCCT, defined a crisis as “a violation of salient stakeholder expectations that can create negative outcomes for stakeholders and/or the organization” (Coombs, 2019, p. 3). SCCT is a prescriptive theory that can be used to predict

how relevant parties will respond to different crisis communication strategies (Coombs et al., 2021) and is therefore a helpful tool for selecting a crisis response. SCCT is underpinned by the belief that the greater the responsibility attributed to an organization in a crisis, the greater the reputational damage it is likely to suffer (Coombs et al., 2021). Accordingly, the first step in an SCCT approach is to assess possible attributions of responsibility for a crisis, and the second step is to consider contextual elements that can affect people's perceptions of crisis responsibility (Coombs et al., 2021). This is done first by considering how the crisis is framed, or, in other words, what type of crisis is being addressed (Coombs et al., 2021).

Coombs categorized crises into three crisis clusters: the victim crisis cluster, the accidental crisis cluster, and the preventable crisis cluster. Victim crises have very low levels of responsibility attribution (e.g., natural disasters; Coombs, 2020). In the face of these crises, the public will likely attribute a victim role to the organization (Coombs, 2007). An accidental crisis, such as equipment failure, results in minimal attribution of responsibility and can occur in cases of technical errors (Coombs et al., 2021). Preventable crises result in strong attribution of responsibility and include human error that causes harm, accidents, or disasters. This category also includes management misconduct and scandals, which occur when management intentionally exploits interest-holders (Coombs et al., 2021). Additionally, Coombs (2020) introduced paracrises as a distinct type of crisis. Paracrises are typically related to social media or reputational crises and include both challenge and misinformation crises (Coombs, 2020). A paracrisis is categorized as a challenge when an organization is publicly accused of irresponsible behaviour, whereas a crisis falls under the misinformation classification when untrue, damaging information circulates about an organization (Coombs, 2020).

The contextual factors that can impact interest-holders' perception of a crisis are crisis history and prior relational reputation (Coombs et al., 2021). These are considered intensifying factors when assessing reputational risk (Coombs, 2007). Ultimately, organizations that have experienced similar crises in the past will be attributed a higher level of responsibility and a higher risk of damage. Similarly, organizations that have previously mistreated interest-holders will be held more responsible when crises occur (Coombs, 2007). When more responsibility is assigned to an organization after a crisis, interest-holders' perceptions of the organization will likely worsen (Coombs et al., 2021). Once a crisis has been assessed and classified, the SCCT guidelines can be employed to select response strategies.

When approached from an SCCT lens, the first step in any crisis response strategy should be to provide an "ethical base" response (Coombs et al., 2021), which involves informing interest-holders of any remaining risk or instructing them to take protective measures to reduce their risk of harm (Coombs, 2020). In the case of IV in sport, this could mean suggesting that athletes avoid contact with a respondent, defined here as the individual against whom a complaint has been made. Once this first step is complete, additional response strategies can be considered to reduce the risk of damage (Coombs et al., 2021). Within this framework, four primary crisis response strategies are identified: deny, diminish, rebuild, and bolster. When using a denial strategy, the goal is to escape responsibility (Coombs et al., 2021). This can be done by attacking the complainant, denying the claim, or shifting blame (Coombs et al., 2021). Diminishment as a strategy involves reducing perceived responsibility by making excuses to deny intent or control over events or by justifying the crisis (Coombs et al., 2021). Rebuilding involves taking action to help crisis survivors, such as offering an apology or compensation (Coombs et al., 2021). Lastly, bolstering is used to help an organization appear in a better light

(e.g., by reminding interest-holders of the organization's past accomplishments, praising interest-holders, or painting the organization as a victim; Coombs et al., 2021). SCCT outlines a series of recommendations based on where a crisis falls along the responsibility continuum. These recommendations are outlined in Table 1, which is adapted from the work of Coombs (2020) and Coombs and colleagues (2021).

Table 1

Summary of Response Strategies Based on the Identification of a Crisis Cluster

Crisis Cluster	Response Options
Victim Crises	Provide an ethical base response first. Consider bolstering but typically does not add much value. Provide compensation or offset costs. Consider adding apology if contextual modifiers indicate that there will be a perception of responsibility. Consider that messages can imply that organization is a victim but this should be a minor point.
Accident Crises	Provide an ethical base response first. Consider bolstering but typically does not add much value. Provide compensation or offset costs. Provide an apology if contextual modifiers indicate that there will be a perception of responsibility.
Preventable Crises – Human Error	Provide an ethical base response first. Consider bolstering but typically does not add much value. Provide compensation or offset costs. Provide an apology or punitive compensation to the response.
Preventable Crises – Management Misconduct and Scams	Provide an ethical base response first. Consider bolstering but typically does not add much value. Provide compensation or offset costs. Provide an apology or punitive compensation. Provide acknowledgment of moral violation and steps that will be taken to prevent future violations.
Paracrises	Do not respond, ignore the paracrisis. Claim that the organization is not responsible. Suppress the crisis by preventing the message from spreading. Acknowledge the problem exists but do not take action. Make some changes to policies. Make all requested changes.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, I did not limit the interview questions to concepts comprising SCCT. Rather, I invited the participants to share their stories and focus on the elements of organizational communication that stood out to them the most. While conducting thematic narrative analysis, it became evident that much of what the participants discussed is aligned with the concepts of SCCT. Conversely, some of what they raised is contradictory to or absent from SCCT. As such, framing the analysis using SCCT resulted in an interesting discussion with multiple theoretical recommendations.

Methodology

Conducting TI Research

In SAMHSA's (2014) TIA, trauma awareness is broadly addressed through general principles applicable across contexts, but research guidelines are absent (Berliner & Kolko, 2016). Although some scholars have proposed TI research frameworks (e.g. Hargrove et al., 2024; Voith et al., 2020) that align with their specific fields of study or are sample-specific, there does not appear to be an agreed-upon TI research framework. Therefore, to ensure that this project was TI, I drew on the work of numerous scholars rather than relying on a single set of guidelines or a single framework, resulting in a flexible, individualized approach that fit this project and my positionality as a researcher.

There are several reasons why I chose to use a TIA. First, implementing a TIA enabled me to prioritize participant safety (Voith et al., 2020), which was an important practice given the vulnerability of the population I worked with. Additionally, using TIAs helps ensure that project designs are participant-centred and foster strong collaboration between the participants and researchers (Crosby et al., 2023). This can help avoid re-traumatization, reduce emotional harm, and minimize participant dropout, thereby producing higher-quality data (Crosby et al., 2023).

Indeed, when re-traumatization occurs during an interview, it can not only cause harm but also compromise data quality, as participants may withhold information (Crosby et al., 2023).

Furthermore, TIAs give researchers greater confidence when working with marginalized or at-risk populations, which can lead to more impactful research that supports positive change and the development of safe, inclusive practices (Crosby et al., 2023).

All methodological choices, described in detail below, were guided by TI principles. As an approach, a TIA was compatible with my constructivist epistemology and with the definitions and scope of IV used. Using SAMHSA's (2014) TIA for this project helped me understand athletes' experiences of IV in sport, reduced the risk of re-traumatizing participants, and supported the collection of rich, meaningful data.

Narrative Inquiry

A narrative inquiry methodology guided this research. Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative inquiry that is typically paired with constructivism due to its emphasis on reflexivity and subjectivity (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). As a narrative inquirer, I collaboratively constructed knowledge based on the participants' experiences and our interpretations of such experiences. To do this, I collected and analyzed personal stories (Papathomas et al., 2024). These stories provided rich context, deep subjectivity, and nuanced explanations (Papathomas, 2016). While these stories are deeply personal, they are also shaped through interactions with others, providing insight into the storytellers' social worlds (Smith, 2010). Stories can serve as a window into a person's identity, as people often tell stories about who they are or whom they aspire to be (McAdams, 2018). As a researcher engaging with narrative inquiry, I was interested in personal as opposed to objective truth and sought stories for their subjectivity, not despite it.

In sport-specific contexts, narrative inquiry enables the researcher to capture emotional and contextual accounts of athletes' experiences and to identify harmful sport narratives embedded within them (Denison & Winslade, 2006). Narrative inquiry is grounded in an understanding of life's complexities, oriented towards social change, and based on the view that people are both individuals with agency and socially situated beings (Smith, 2010). Indeed, narrative inquiry allowed me to collect rich data that provided invaluable insight into the participants' experiences of organizational communications. The participants discussed complex, layered emotions and the long-lasting, life-changing implications of their experiences, which were very nuanced. This approach allowed me to discuss emotional, personal, and societal elements, analyze them separately, and observe how they are interwoven.

In addition to analytical strengths, narrative inquiry also offers communicative advantages. Given that people make sense of their lives and those around them through stories (McAdams, 2018), presenting research in narrative form can resonate deeply with audiences. Morality, including what is right versus what is wrong, how the actions of organizations impact individuals, and ethical responsibility played an important role in the questions asked throughout my research, and is typically highlighted in stories (McAdams, 2018). Given these considerations, narrative inquiry was an appropriate methodological choice, as it emphasizes moral concerns while remaining accessible to a broad audience. It also supports in-depth and complex analysis, embraces subjectivity, facilitates the generation of novel insights, and is highly practical. Furthermore, narrative inquiry offers opportunities to explore individuals' and groups' lived experiences in depth, capturing the complexity of their realities (Jowett, 2008).

I chose narrative inquiry for this study because it aligns with my constructivist epistemology and the principles of TIAs. It also centres subjectivity and the empowerment of

research participants, both of which are central to this work. By providing participants with the opportunity to interpret and articulate their own experiences via storytelling narrative researchers are able to demonstrate sensitivity to participants' needs (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2012a). This is particularly important given that people organize life events and derive meaning through narratives; making sense of traumatic events can be life-changing or even life-saving and is especially beneficial for individuals whose narratives have been disrupted by trauma or illness (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2012b). Furthermore, storytelling can contribute to identity reconstruction and a new understanding of oneself, which can lead to healing (Papathomas et al., 2024).

In line with the principles of TIAs and CFT, narrative inquiry can be used to amplify marginalized voices and advocate for social justice (Papathomas et al., 2024). The use of narrative methodologies enhances participants' agency and autonomy over their stories and allows them to share experiences in their own words (Papathomas et al., 2024). Additionally, narrative inquiry offers a way to explore trauma that emphasizes context and meaning rather than symptoms, allowing readers to develop a deeper understanding of these experiences (Papathomas et al., 2024). For the data collection portion of this narrative inquiry, I conducted narrative interviews, the specifics of which will be outlined in the following sections of this thesis.

Methods

In line with narrative inquiry and TIAs, and following approval from the University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board (Ethics File Number H-08025011692), I conducted narrative interviews. In this section, I will outline the sampling and recruitment strategies I used and how I conducted narrative interviews.

Recruitment and Sampling

I used purposive and snowball sampling to recruit participants. Purposive sampling was an appropriate choice because I was seeking participants with specific characteristics (DeCarlo, 2018). Additionally, snowball sampling is effective when researching stigmatized topics (DeCarlo, 2018). My supervisor and I first contacted individuals in our networks whom we knew were involved in IV cases (i.e., purposive sampling). I also shared recruitment materials (see Appendices B, C, and D) on my personal and professional social media pages (Instagram and LinkedIn). Participants were also encouraged to share the invitation to participate with their networks (i.e., snowball sampling). I had intended to share recruitment materials via email to Canadian university athletic departments, national sport organizations, and provincial sport organizations. However, I received significant interest following the initial recruitment efforts, so I decided to hold off on emailing organizations until interviews had begun and I could better assess whether additional participants were needed. As I conducted data collection and analysis concurrently, I assessed data quality and determined that the sample size of eight participants was sufficient, as it had resulted in significant depth and richness that would allow for an in-depth analysis and multiple insights into the research questions. During recruitment and as part of a TIA, I ensured I used transparent language and emphasized participants' right to opt out or withdraw from the study at any time (Campbell et al., 2019).

To participate in this study, individuals were required to (1) be current or former athletes, (2) have experienced IV during their time in sport, (3) have been affiliated with a team, club, or organization that received a complaint regarding IV, and (4) be over the age of 18. I included athletes who did not make formal complaints in the study, as I recognize that not all survivors choose to come forward. Furthermore, complaints discussed by the participants did not need to

have been made public, as decisions not to acknowledge complaints publicly are often part of organizational communication planning processes.

Participants

In line with the tenets of narrative inquiry, this study included a small number of participants and featured lengthy interviews (Kim, 2016). Specifically, I conducted interviews with eight participants, with interviews lasting between 58 and 104 minutes. Participants were all women; seven identified as white, and one as mixed race. They were between 24 and 31 years of age. The participants had competed in artistic swimming, basketball, gymnastics, rowing, rugby, and track and field at levels ranging from provincial to international. Half of the participants were still competing, while the other half had retired for up to 9 years.

Pre-Participation

After expressing interest in the study, I scheduled pre-participation calls with participants. The details of the pre-participation call are outlined in Appendix E and were informed by the TIA concepts of safety, empowerment, voice, and choice, as well as the work of authors who have used TIAs in research (Crosby et al., 2023; Isobel, 2021; McMahon et al., 2023; Papathomas et al., 2024). The main objective of this call was to allow the participants the opportunity to make an informed decision about their involvement in the study. Once the participants read, understood, and signed the informed consent form (see Appendices F and G) and agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire. Following these steps, I conducted narrative interviews in accordance with the procedures outlined below.

Narrative Interviews

Although participation in a research study does not typically result in re-traumatization, as suggested by Isobel (2021), it is important to take a TIA when working with participants who have experienced trauma (Isobel, 2021). In many cases, trauma survivors find it challenging to discuss situations that are linked to traumatic events. For these reasons, several efforts, including those described below, were made to reduce or manage emotional distress and psychological risk (Isobel, 2021). The following procedures were used to reduce the risk of participant re-traumatization throughout the interview process.

SAMHSA (2014) notes that sharing lived experiences can position the researcher as a peer supporter. Thus, I, the interviewer, focused on building trust both before and during the interview by disclosing my personal experiences of IV in sport, sharing my motivation for this project, actively listening to the participants, and responding honestly to questions. The participants were also offered the option to bring a peer to the interview for support (Crosby et al., 2023; Isobel, 2021), although none chose to do so. Co-design was not feasible given the time constraints of this project. However, I encouraged participant feedback throughout data collection and analysis and invited the participants to share ideas on how to collect, use and disseminate the findings (Crosby et al., 2023). An example of a suggestion from a participant that was implemented during data collection was to provide the participants with fidget toys for use during in-person interviews. This also led me to reflect further on how I could make the interview space more comfortable for the participants and implement a few additional comfort measures (e.g., providing snacks, water bottles, paper and pens for doodling, and a blanket).

During interviews, it was crucial to support the participants if they chose to skip questions, take breaks, or end early (Isobel, 2021). Drawing on Stirling and Kerr's (2013) work, I

was prepared to shift to lighter questions about participants' sport participation if they showed signs of emotional distress, and to follow their lead when returning to more challenging topics. In preparation, I also became familiar with the trauma literature and participated in TI training. I developed a distress management protocol (see Appendix H) that addressed when and how to end an interview, ensuring the participant is safe and has appropriate resources, and that the participant has control over what they choose to share. This protocol was developed based on principles from the qualitative research distress protocol (Whitney & Evered, 2022) and TI research approaches (Isobel, 2021). These tools, along with my preparation, helped me feel comfortable and confident in the interviews.

Additionally, recognizing that researcher safety is an essential but often overlooked aspect of a TIA, I developed a self-care plan to protect my well-being throughout the research process. This plan is outlined in Appendix I and is informed by the work of Smith (2024), Silverio and colleagues (2022), and Giles and colleagues (2024). My plan contained the following intentions: maintaining formal psychological support throughout data collection, setting up a buddy system (Silverio et al., 2022) with my thesis supervisor to debrief interviews, leaning on my personal support system, allowing at least two days between interviews, maintaining regular sleep and exercise schedules, and journaling regularly. I followed this plan throughout the data collection process and believe it was essential to my ability to be a good interviewer and to approach this study and analysis with an understanding and awareness of my biases. It also helped ensure that this research process was positive and enjoyable for me. Overall, I believe the TI efforts used throughout the interview process were helpful to both the participants and me; the participants did not exhibit severe emotional distress, and no interviews ended early.

The narrative interviews were split into two phases: the narration phase and the conversation phase (Kim, 2016). I started the interviews with a broad question to encourage the interviewee to tell their story in as much detail as possible. During this initial narration, I interjected as little as possible. Once the participants appeared to have finished telling their stories, I engaged them with prewritten questions as needed. I primarily used this phase to seek clarification, encourage the participants to expand on specific elements of their stories, and relate their experiences to my research questions. The specifics of these phases are outlined in further detail in the interview guide (See Appendix J). Following the interviews, the participants were given the option to review the final papers prior to publication and to select their own pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

I used thematic narrative analysis, a subcategory of narrative analysis (Esin, 2011), to analyze the data for this project. As inquiry and analysis progressed, I edited the stories, information, and conversations to create retellings, a common practice in narrative inquiry (Papathomas, 2016). Researchers can act as story analysts, storytellers, or both (Smith, 2017). As part of this research, I wrote two publishable papers. For both papers, I began the analytical process by acting as a story analyst, providing analytical accounts of the stories shared by the participants (Donnelly et al., 2024). When working on the second publishable paper, I moved between the roles of story analyst and storyteller. As a storyteller, I conveyed my interpretation through storytelling (Donnelly et al., 2024), which led to the creation of a short story. In my storyteller role, I drew on the creative analytical practice of creative nonfiction. Initially approaching the analysis as a story analyst allowed me to focus on the content of participants' interviews (Esin, 2011; Smith, 2017). During analysis, I identified themes within individual

stories, themes that ran through multiple stories, and the relationships among themes. I followed the suggested steps for thematic narrative analysis, which are (1) writing, which is done continuously throughout the analysis process, (2) transcribing data, (3) organizing the data into files, (4) narrative indwelling (i.e., re-reading and listening to data while writing down initial thoughts), (5) identifying narrative themes (a narrative theme is a common theme that runs through a story or between several stories) and thematic relationships, (6) describing and interpreting each theme as well as the relationships between the themes, and (7) presenting the findings (Smith, 2017). I began the thematic narrative analysis process once the first interview was complete and approached analysis iteratively, revisiting transcriptions multiple times. Themes and ideas were noted but not coded, allowing me to retell participants' stories and identify additional aspects that did not necessarily fit within a storyline.

The use of thematic narrative analysis allows the researcher to honour the experiences of the research participants (Ross & Green, 2011), which is one of the main reasons I selected it for this project. It also facilitated a nuanced understanding of the complexities of human experiences and social relationships. It highlighted the individual experiences and social processes that contribute to the formation of meaning and identities (Esin, 2011). Thematic narrative analysis is aligned with constructivism; adopting this perspective enables the researcher to examine how social order is constructed through conversation and interaction (Esin, 2011). In line with a constructivist approach to narrative analysis, I focused on how the participants made sense of their stories, positioned themselves within them, and how interaction shaped their narratives (Esin, 2011). In the second of the two publishable papers featured below, I used the creative analytical practice of creative nonfiction to represent the study results. Creative nonfiction is an approach wherein collected data is represented through a fictional story (Smith et al., 2016). In

Smith and colleagues' (2016) words, "each story is fictional in form yet factual in content" (p. 59). I used creative nonfiction to showcase multiple theoretical points, including those that might be interpreted by the reader and go beyond what I intentionally showed. This is possible because readers are likely to interpret the findings presented via creative nonfiction in their own ways (Smith et al., 2016). It also allowed me to protect participants' anonymity while still telling a story that feels personal and is relatable.. Importantly, creative nonfiction is considered an effective approach to reaching readers beyond academia and bridging the gap between research and practice (Smith et al., 2013); developing a product accessible to a broad range of readers was an important part of the thesis-writing process for me.

Thesis Format

This thesis is written in the publishable paper format; specifically, I wrote two publishable papers. These papers make up the following two chapters of the thesis. The next chapter features the first paper in which I developed a realist tale by conducting thematic narrative analysis from the standpoint of a story analyst. This first paper addresses the following research question: How do athletes who have experienced IV describe their experiences with, and the impact of, sport organizations' communication practices following an IV-related complaint? In the second paper, the third chapter of this thesis, I explore the second research question: How do athletes who have experienced IV describe the communication they wanted to receive from their sport organization following an IV-related complaint? The results of the second paper are presented as a series of six considerations for crisis communicators and a short story that depicts a scenario reflective of the communication approaches the participants wanted to hear. The fourth and final chapter of this thesis, the conclusion, includes a discussion of both

papers in relation to each other as well as the study's implications, limitations, and considerations for future directions.

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**Chapter Two: Crisis Communications in the Context of Safe Sport Cases: A Whole Other
Hurdle**

Abstract

A substantial body of research has documented both the high prevalence of interpersonal violence (IV) in sport and its many harmful impacts, including the development of eating disorders and suicidal thoughts. Despite this, what occurs following cases of IV in sport remains largely unexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the effects of organizational communication on athletes who have experienced IV. To date, the effectiveness of organizational communications following IV cases has been examined primarily by analyzing public responses. However, little attention has been paid to the impact of these communications on survivors themselves. Narrative interviews were conducted with eight athletes who had experienced IV. Thematic narrative analysis of these accounts led to the development of a realist tale that illustrates how organizational communication may shape athletes' experiences following an IV case. These experiences include anticipation and excitement as athletes awaited the sharing of their stories; disappointment and frustration when organizational responses fell short of expectations; efforts to pursue storytelling through media engagement; and lasting feelings of hurt, distrust, anger, and skepticism.

The purpose of this study was to examine how athletes who have experienced interpersonal violence (IV) describe their experiences with, and the impact of, sport organizations' communication practices following an IV-related complaint. The occurrence of IV, which Krug (2002) defines as the "intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (p. 5) has been linked to many common behaviours within sport systems, such as the normalization of pushing through pain, intense pressure, and extreme expectations (McGee et al., 2025). In other studies, researchers have identified that sport culture and the experience of reporting IV within sport contexts can be harmful (e.g., Barker-Ruchti & Purdy, 2025; Eliasson, 2024; Kerr et al., 2020; Roberts & Quigley, 2024). Moreover, organizational communication following IV cases, primarily by evaluating organizations' response strategies and their effectiveness in repairing organizational reputation, has been explored in existing research (Frederick et al., 2021). Despite these advances, what athletes encounter following disclosure remains relatively unexplored. In particular, little is known about how organizational communication during and after an IV-related complaint may shape survivors' experiences or contribute to further harm. Addressing this gap, the present study used narrative inquiry and thematic narrative analysis (TNA) to examine how athletes who have experienced IV describe their experiences with, and the impact of, sport organizations' communication practices following an IV-related complaint. Furthermore, we used critical feminist theory (CFT) to advance our understanding of participants' experiences by examining how power, gender, and resistance shaped their experiences. By centring survivors' perspectives, this study contributes to

a deeper understanding of how sport environments may perpetuate harm beyond the initial IV experience.

Literature Review

The Impacts of IV in Sport

IV in sport occurs at rates ranging from 44% to 86% (Tuakli-Wosoru et al., 2024) and has significant and enduring impacts on those who experience it. Evidence suggests that these impacts can be profound and long-lasting. For instance, in their study of eight female Canadian National Team athletes, Kerr and colleagues (2020) found that the participants who had experienced IV exhibited symptoms closely resembling those of post-traumatic stress disorder. These findings align with broader research linking IV in sport to experiences of self-harm, disordered eating, and suicidal thoughts (Wilson, Kerr, Bataglia et al., 2022; Wilson, Kerr, Stirling et al., 2022), as well as the development of eating disorders (Stirling & Kerr, 2013). Additionally, researchers have documented increased difficulty transitioning out of sport for IV survivors, often attributed to the need for time to heal and cope with feelings, such as bitterness, regret, and anger (Kerr et al., 2019; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). Relatedly, experiences of IV in sport have been associated with reduced motivation for or interest in sport (Stirling & Kerr, 2013; Yabe et al., 2019). Over the longer term, effects may include difficulties forming attachments and an increased likelihood of entering abusive relationships (Kerr et al., 2020). Collectively, this body of work demonstrates that the impacts of IV in sport can be highly damaging and long-lasting. The present study was grounded in an understanding of this potential harm and examined whether communication associated with IV in sport may constitute an additional source of harm.

Lived Experience as Knowledge in IV Research

Ongoing discussions within safe sport literature have emphasized the importance of recognizing lived experience as a legitimate form of knowledge, particularly in research on child abuse in sport and abuse in sport more broadly (e.g., Pankowiak, 2025). The inclusion of lived experience in safe sport research provides theoretical, historical, ethical, political, and practical value (Pankowiak, 2025) and is increasingly reflected in the growing body of safe sport literature. For example, researchers have drawn on the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced IV in sport to examine conformity to the sport ethic and psychological abuse in sport (McGee et al., 2025). Additionally, athletes' voices have also been gathered to examine the effects of emotional abuse by coaches on athletes (e.g., Eliasson, 2024; Kerr et al., 2020; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). Through inquiry that focuses on lived experience, Kerr and colleagues (2020) found that athletes may experience emotional abuse differently depending on where they are in their sport journey. Athletes who were still competing expressed feeling hurt, anxious, unhappy, and depressed, and described occasional suicidal ideation (Kerr et al., 2020). The participants in the aforementioned study also described difficulty forming new relationships after their time in sport, partly because they wanted to avoid having to explain their past sporting experiences to new people. Following their transition out of sport, positive feelings, such as newfound confidence and identity rebuilding, were described; however, persistent eating disorders and negative memories persisted over time (Kerr et al., 2020). This exploration of athletes' perspectives provided the authors with a nuanced understanding of athletes' complex experiences of emotional abuse.

Relatedly, additional scholars have gathered athletes' perspectives on safe sport, including their experiences with safe sport and their views on advancing it (e.g., Gurgis et al.,

2022; MacIntosh et al., 2025; Purdy & Lang, 2023; Wilson, Kerr, Bataglia et al., 2022). While not all of this work centres exclusively on survivors of IV, these studies have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of how harm is experienced and interpreted within sport systems. Building on this, individuals with lived experience can provide insights into situations that differ from those who have not experienced them (Pankowiak, 2025). The inclusion of lived experience as knowledge also allows for the centring of non-dominant voices, the development of diverse knowledge, the representation of survivors, and the challenging of assumptions accepted as universal truths despite not representing all voices (Pankowiak, 2025). For these reasons, as well as for its suitability in helping us understand athletes' experiences of organizational communications, the prioritization of lived experience, the collection of which was supported by a trauma-informed approach (TIA), was central to this study.

IV-Related Communications

Crisis communication is part of the larger process of crisis management, which aims to reduce the effects of a crisis (Coombs & Harker, 2021). In this study, we focused on organizations' communications following an IV complaint, which constitutes a crisis for the organization. Following an allegation of IV, organizations make numerous crisis-management decisions, which are often closely connected to communication decisions. For example, an organization may decide whether to dismiss a coach and separately decide whether and how to communicate that decision to interest-holders. Given the scope of this paper, we focus on the communication responses that occurred and their impact on athletes. However, we encourage practitioners to consider how all crisis-management decisions following an allegation of IV, as well as decisions about whether and how to communicate those decisions, may affect survivors.

Crisis communication scholars have explored how individual athletes (e.g., Benoit & Hanczor, 1994), teams (e.g., Brown et al., 2020) and sport organizations (e.g., Fortunato, 2008; Pfahl & Bates, 2008) respond to crises. They have studied crises related to substance use, doping, cheating, and allegations of sexual misconduct (Frederick & Pegoraro, 2023; Benoit, 2018) and have primarily examined crises retrospectively by gathering public-facing statements and public reactions to communication approaches. Conversely, sport crisis communication researchers have largely overlooked internal communication efforts and insider perspectives in crisis responses. More broadly, crisis communication researchers have rarely used lived experience in their work. When researchers have examined lived experiences, the perspectives of decision-makers and communicators have been their primary focus (e.g., Abbas & Miller, 2025; Macnamara, 2021; Schoofs et al., 2022), while survivors' perspectives remain largely absent from this literature. Regarding IV cases, researchers have studied organizations' responses after their release (e.g., Frederick et al., 2021), but have paid little attention to how IV survivors experience these communications and how they may contribute to further harm during and after the complaint process. To address this gap, we examined athletes' accounts of organizational communication during and after instances of IV. This examination extends both safe sport and sport communication scholarship by centring the experiences of those directly affected.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we draw on critical feminist theory (CFT). Scholarship grounded in CFT is characterized by a focus on social change, praxis, and the examination of gender and power relations (Byerly, 2018; Shaw, 2024; Waldron, 2025). Central to this work is an emphasis on identifying oppression and systemic barriers and examining how they shape social experiences

(Waldron, 2025). Within feminist sport communication research, CFT has been used to examine how language contributes to power inequities (Shaw, 2024) and how institutions shape societal meaning through discourse (Waldron, 2025). Applying a critical feminist approach to sport research requires recognition that gender, power, and social justice are fundamental to understanding sport systems (Krane & Prewitt-White, 2025). This approach prioritizes the critical evaluation of dominant assumptions and traditions, the acknowledgment of inequity, and the articulation of possibilities for change (Krane & Prewitt-White, 2025). In this study, these foundational elements of CFT enabled a critical examination of the communication practices and experiences described by the participants and an understanding of whether and how these practices and experiences resulted in harm. In line with CFT, we considered the athletes as individuals “located and interacting within an embodied context constituted of personal, symbolic, gendered, interactional, societal, structural, ideological, and political influences” (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 122). Accordingly, this study’s focus extends beyond an individual level to consider the broader societal factors and actors that shape athletes’ experiences of organizational communication.

Several of the key tenets of CFT align with the trauma-informed approach used in this project. These principles include elevating the voices of individuals who have experienced harm, recognizing multiple perspectives and truths, preventing the silencing of survivors, and identifying patterns of oppression that contribute to the high prevalence of IV in sport (Prewitt-White, 2025). In alignment with CFT, this research prioritized lived experience as a form of knowledge and sought to emphasize narratives that diverge from what might be considered dominant knowledge (Waldron, 2025). Emphasizing the participants' perspectives, acknowledging multiple truths, and investigating systemic and societal factors of oppression

supported alignment between the study's methodological approach and the needs of individuals with lived experience. Attention to participant well-being was reflected throughout the study and informed key methodological decisions.

Navigating Trauma Research

To reduce the risk of re-traumatization of all involved parties, study methods were informed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) TIA (SAMHSA, 2014). A researcher using a TIA acknowledges the potential impacts of trauma and involves embedding knowledge of trauma into all aspects of a system, organization, or program to avoid re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014). We thoughtfully applied the six key principles of SAMHSA's (2014) TIA (i.e., safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice, and choice, and cultural, historical, and gender issues) throughout the development and execution of this project. This enabled the prioritization of participant safety (Voith et al., 2020) and the development of a participant-centred research design that fosters strong collaboration between the participants and researchers (Crosby et al., 2023). Additionally, this approach was intended to help reduce the risk of re-traumatization, minimize emotional harm, and limit participant dropout, thereby supporting the collection of higher-quality data (Crosby et al., 2023).

SAMHSA's (2014) TIA is well aligned with constructivism, the epistemological stance that guided this study. Constructivism is characterized by a belief that humans construct meaning through their experiences and interpretations (Aminah & Asl, 2015). In research, this can be understood as the belief that knowledge is created collaboratively through interactions between the research participants and researchers, and that researchers unavoidably bring their beliefs and subjectivity to their research (Mann & MacLeod, 2015). This inevitably affects how data are

perceived and, therefore, shared (Mann & MacLeod, 2015). In acknowledgment of our subjectivity and in keeping with the constructivist belief that understanding is shaped by our experiences and personal interpretations, we will now share a few assumptions and experiences that have shaped the development and analysis of this project.

We, in line with the work of other researchers (e.g., McMahon et al., 2023), acknowledge that IV experienced in sport is likely to result in trauma. Acknowledging that IV experiences in sport are, for many, traumatic and that the research process itself can be traumatic allowed us to support the research participants' well-being while simultaneously gathering high-quality research data (Crosby et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2023). This belief was shaped by our personal sport experiences. The first author of this paper identifies as a survivor of IV in sport. She observed and experienced IV in sport for many years as a track and field athlete. Following her time as an athlete, she worked in sport marketing and communications, which, paired with her athletic experiences, shaped her understanding of organizational communication and its impact on survivors of IV. The second author, through her work as a certified mental performance consultant and a sport abuse helpline operator, has experience supporting athletes through IV cases. Her perception and understanding of how organizational communications can impact athletes were largely shaped by her proximity to IV cases and the athletes undergoing them.

While we view our shared understanding as a benefit to this project, we also entered it knowing that not everyone has the same experience with IV or organizational communications. This is well represented in the results of this study, which describe a range of experiences and opinions, many of which differ from what the authors experienced and observed before conducting this project. To maintain reflexivity, the authors engaged in frequent reflexive discussions throughout the study's design and execution. The first author also maintained a

reflexive journal and adhered to a pre-established self-care action plan (Giles et al., 2024) throughout the research process. The acknowledgment of subjectivity and consideration of bias are well aligned with a TIA, the authors' backgrounds and epistemological stances, and the methodology and methods used to guide this study.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry is well aligned with many tenets of TIA research, such as providing survivors the opportunity to share and reflect on their stories, giving the participants autonomy and agency, and supporting their healing (Papathomas et al., 2024). This alignment is one reason it was used in this study. Researchers who engage in narrative inquiry collect and analyze stories that provide context, subjectivity, and explanations (Papathomas, 2016). These stories are personal and therefore offer insight into individual storytellers, but they are also shaped through interactions with others and reveal the storyteller's social and cultural world (Smith, 2010). In the context of this study, narrative inquiry allowed us to deepen our understanding of each participant's experiences, identify feelings and narratives that ran through all stories, and make sense of social factors, such as power inequities, present in the stories.

Methods

Following approval from the University's Ethics Review Board (See Appendix K), we used snowball and purposive sampling to recruit eight current and former athletes who had experienced IV, were over 18, and were affiliated with an organization that had received a complaint alleging IV. Seven of the participants self-identified as white women, while one self-identified as a mixed-race woman. They participated in artistic swimming, basketball, gymnastics, rowing, rugby, and track and field at levels ranging from provincial to international. Half of the participants still compete in sport, while the other half retired within the last 10 years.

Once an individual expressed interest in participating in this study, they were invited to a pre-participation call, during which they could make an informed decision about their involvement. During these calls, attention was given to multiple elements of a TIA; the participants were given choices about the details of their interview (Crosby et al., 2023), interviewers were transparent about research goals and topics (Papathomas et al., 2024) and expressed an openness to feedback from the participants (Crosby et al., 2023). Once the participants fully understood the study details, were comfortable with them, and had given informed consent to participate, interviews were scheduled. No participants withdrew following the pre-participation call or at any later stage of the study.

Following the pre-participation call, we conducted narrative interviews with each participant. In the narration phase of the interview, we posed a broad question, encouraging the participants to tell their story in the way that best suited them. This approach aligns with both narrative inquiry, as it provides an opportunity to focus on the storyteller's perspective (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Kim, 2016) and TIAs, as it provided them with the opportunity to choose which parts of their stories to share, thereby giving them autonomy and contributing to their sense of safety. This was followed by the conversation phase, during which the interviewer (i.e., first author) used a mix of prepared and probing questions to elicit further clarification, depth, and detail from the participants.

In line with the TIA approach undertaken, several efforts were made to reduce or manage emotional distress and psychological risk. These were based on the work of other scholars who have implemented TIAs in research (Crosby et al., 2023; Isobel, 2019), and they included building trust both before and during the interview by the first author disclosing her personal experiences of IV in sport, sharing her motivation for this project, actively listening to the

participants, and responding honestly to questions. Additionally, a distress management protocol was developed prior to the interview process, equipping the interviewer to respond appropriately to potential emotional distress during interviews. It was developed based on the principles of the qualitative research distress protocol (Whitney & Evered, 2022).

Data Analysis

We began the analytic process, guided by thematic narrative analysis following the completion of the first interview. Consistent with Smith (2017), we conducted the analysis as an iterative and cyclical process involving writing, transcribing data, organizing the data into files, narrative indwelling, identifying narrative themes and thematic relationships, describing and interpreting each theme and its relationships to other themes, and presenting the findings. We adopted a story-analyst stance, analyzing the participants' narratives and presenting our findings as a realist tale that captured common aspects of their experiences, drawn from participant accounts. Findings were therefore presented as a realist tale, typically consisting of edited data, such as participant quotes, and did not contain researcher voice (Smith et al., 2016). The focus of a realist tale is on the study participants, and is characterized by a heavy use of detail (King, 2017). The use of a realist tale presented an opportunity to centre the participants' voices, a concept that is also in alignment with the use of CFT and its emphasis on highlighting voices that are repositioned as non-dominant. While the research voice is not written into this story, it is important to acknowledge that the selection, grouping, presentation, and order of the quotes reflect our interpretation of the data. We, the researchers, were co-creators of the knowledge shared below through the participants' voices.

Results

The realist tale presented herein captures the following narrative themes that we developed during analysis: (1) something is brewing, (2) that was...not what we had in mind, (3) taking it into our own hands, and (4) when all is said and done, it does not feel done at all.

Quotes were used throughout to ensure an authentic representation of the athletes who participated in this study.

Something is Brewing

Most of the participants were aware that a complaint alleging IV had been submitted to their organization, whether this was because they made the complaint themselves, were close to someone who had, or had heard about it through the metaphorical rumour mill. They described a period of anticipation that was rich with emotion. For Beatrice, the dominant feeling was excitement: “I was excited. I was like, ‘this is great. Maybe something will actually change,’” she shared. Alice also described feeling excited as she awaited the unfolding of a complaint process. She outlined what she thought she was about to gain:

I thought that if things had gone the way I envisioned it, where this report came out that unearthed everything... I thought things could really change. And then that my life, or at least my life as an athlete, could change.

In Alex’s case, she was not the only one anticipating the outcome of an IV complaint; rumours were swirling, and the media and public knew something was coming. In this case, game play was suspended, and fans and the public turned on the athletes and blamed them for the disruption caused. Alex described what it felt like to stay silent in the face of public scrutiny: “I think that was definitely one of the hardest parts. And I think for a lot of us, we’re like, okay, this really sucks.” She chose silence early in the process because she believed that letting the investigation

play out and then having her story shared would clear the air and restore her and her team's reputation. "When this investigation comes out, it'll give us the foundation to confront these allegations, and it'll give us the teeth to really be able to reverse all this damage that's been done," she continued. The participants, for the most part, were willing to be patient through difficult complaint processes, public backlash, and disrupted operations, believing that good things were on the horizon. They were excited for the IV to stop, for cultures to shift, to feel validated, and for their stories to be told.

While most participants experienced excitement as they waited and hoped for their cases to be resolved and publicized, others were understandably nervous and spoke of fear of reprimand, judgment, and isolation as contributors to pre-publication unease. Despite this, the overwhelming feeling described by the participants at this stage was excitement. Whether paired with joy or dread, the participants described a sense of anticipation in the lead-up to what they believed would be the resolution and publication of IV complaints. They described holding their breath and repeatedly refreshing their email accounts for days as they waited for something to happen. However, what actually happened did not typically live up to the participants' expectations.

That was...not What we had in Mind

When communications did occur, they did not align with the participants' expectations; published responses failed to acknowledge survivors, offer support, or address IV, resulting in several challenges. Alice shared:

I thought that if people saw this report, if it came out and was written properly, they would see it and get it, and the toxicity would go away because people would understand that all of this is wrong. And that didn't happen at all.

She continued:

Yeah, it was just disappointing. It was this thing that could have been so beautifully orchestrated, but it was just a mess. And just didn't come together. It was not the production that any of us were hoping for...Or deserved. And I felt a bit foolish being part of it.

According to most of the participants, the organizations did not communicate at all. Martha described this lack of communication as invalidating. "It definitely felt a little bit invalidating to not say anything about the impact it had on so many people," she shared. The participants spoke of being let down by the response and struck by the disappointing "end" of the situation. In many, albeit not all, cases, the perpetrator of abuse was removed from training environments. However, the participants described no celebration or acknowledgment of a win. Rather, teammates, coaches, and administrators either carried on as if nothing had happened or scrambled to cast the organization in a positive light. For many of the participants, this was a challenging reality to face. They had put in a lot of work, been vulnerable, and endured a lot of pain, all for little to no acknowledgment, thanks, support, or change. Beyond acknowledgment, they had hopes for fresh starts, rebrands, restructuring, and, as Alice simply put, "they needed to get rid of these abusive men and their sidekicks." Without organizations' explicit acknowledgement that IV had occurred and was unacceptable, broader cultural change was unlikely.

Alice, Beatrice, Noah, and Jasmine all described uncomfortable training environments after their complaints were publicized. They used words like "awkward" and "tense" to describe what it felt like to be in the training environments that they had once considered home. In some cases, social groups were formed based on who had come forward and who had not, and the

complainants were considered liars and instigators of drama. In Martha's case, there was initially no public statement, so when she moved to a new city and began training there, she felt misunderstood. "It was very isolating. There were only one or two people that I felt like I could talk to," she explained. She shared that later, when public statements were made about her former coach, she was better able to connect with her peers. They understood her more and were better able to empathize with her past experiences in the sport.

Beyond frustration, there is a heaviness to what the participants described feeling as their complaints were "resolved" and published. They described feeling gaslit by their organizations and, as a result, doubting themselves. This sentiment was expressed across the interviews. For instance, Jane shared:

It just makes you feel like what you're doing...there's something wrong with what you're doing, as if you're a bad person or you're not valid for feeling the way that you're feeling or that you're blowing things out of proportion or that something's just wrong. [The organization] is not supportive, and that makes you second-guess everything.

Alice echoed Jane's feeling:

It also made me feel gaslit, I will say, because I think that I knew about myself through all this, that I had heightened anxiety anyway. But the more dismissive it felt, the more not being taken seriously it felt, the more it was like, am I just in my head about this? Like, is this a me problem?

She connected the feeling to what she felt like while being abused.

Even the way [the perpetrator] was treating me way back, it was like, maybe this is my problem. Maybe it's bigger in my head, or maybe I'm doing something to ask for it or

something. I think it was a theme throughout. So then, being dismissed at every step also made me question, did this really happen? Is it as big a deal as I think it is?

In Alex's case, an investigation that she deemed was flawed found that abuse had not occurred.

This was shared publicly and led her to feelings similar to those described by Jane and Alice:

I think a lot of people internalized those findings and internalized people's external opinions, and myself included, were like wait, am I crazy? Did we not experience this? A lot of people still have a lot of shame around it and don't really want to talk about it because they kind of started to believe what everybody else was saying about us.

In addition to judging themselves, when the participants judged that perpetrators did not receive sufficient consequences, their perceptions of the perpetrators sometimes changed.

Beatrice described being in disbelief when an abusive coach was not fired. It made her believe that people could get away with anything in her sport without consequences. As a result, they felt bigger, and she felt smaller. She described being "afraid of them before, but I was petrified of them after." She elaborated as follows:

I was like, oh, my God...you can even sue this woman, and she's still going to be here.

So, then I became extremely scared. And I remember I didn't tell my mom I was scared of her. I'd be like, oh, Mom, I really don't want to go. I would fake throwing up. I was like, I can't do this.

What Beatrice described is what occurred following a lack of action, as well as the actions being taken not being communicated. Similarly, Jane felt powerless.

[I] definitely [felt] gaslit and powerless. You just don't really have a voice. So, it was definitely really damaging, I think their silence and their lack of action or guidance, or

just really any ounce of support...in the moment, you don't realize how messed up that is, and then when I'm talking about it now, I'm like, just like wow.

While none of the individuals we interviewed were completely satisfied with their organization's response, some positive takeaways emerged. A lengthy statement was released about Jasmine's organization. She was critical of its contents and the way her organization responded to the report, but having parts of her story out there did bring her some of what she had been hoping for. "I just remember kind of being like, okay, wow, it's finally out. People can now read about it. They can see that someone else agrees that I at least wasn't lying," she shared. It took time for Martha's abuser to be acknowledged publicly, but once it occurred, she finally felt validated by her peers. She shared that following the announcement, people reached out.

They were like, oh, how are you feeling about this? Are you feeling OK about it? I think it was kind of the first time for them where they were like, oh, like, "Martha's not just kind of overreacting about things. It sounds like this is actually really tough."

Similarly, once Jesse saw pieces of her story shared publicly, it improved some of her relationships.

It definitely made me closer with some of my teammates who had gone through very similar experiences. One of them is now my best friend. We have all these shared experiences and have really lived similar lives, and I think it brought us closer to have that understanding.

When athletes' expectations were not met, they were often motivated to pursue their goals on their own terms.

Taking it into Our Own Hands

Dissatisfied with their organizations' communication, many of the participants turned to alternative avenues for storytelling, including traditional media and social media. They were motivated to tell their stories for several reasons. Noah shared that she was "tired of keeping a secret for somebody who didn't deserve it." Additionally, she wanted people to understand what had happened, without having to constantly explain it herself. Her decision to work with a journalist to share her story ultimately came from frustration with her organization, which had put more effort into covering up the story than improving the situation. Although Noah had not initially wanted to pursue this route, after observing patterns of abuse, purposeful organizational silence, and exhausting other avenues, she felt that her "only option [was] to bring these people public."

Jane's organization stayed silent, but she described feeling a strong urge to get her story out: "We all really wanted to be able to say something and honour all the athletes [who were] part of the statement and to give it the respect and acknowledgement that it deserved." She shared that the complainants wanted to explain their reasoning for coming forward and why it was so important to do so. She also wanted others to know that they "want[ed] to have a safe environment for the next generation of athletes," and that, for them, "a safe environment is more important than a medal."

Jasmine wanted to be believed, and she also wanted accountability for her abusers. She felt that the story needed to be told broadly and that the organization's staff had failed to do this by disputing the reports that came from the investigations, not acknowledging the abuse that occurred, and making statements speaking to the personal challenges they had gone through as a result of the stresses of the investigation, rather than ever speaking of the athletes who had been

abused. During her interview for this study, Jasmine read through a statement she had received from an administrator, following her case, in which the administrator drew attention to the personal challenges he faced in responding to the complaint. She expressed her frustration at his lack of accountability:

So once again, he's just saying this club is awesome, and it's [done] such great things for people. And this is the letter that's supposed to be, like, "hey, we've broken your trust, harm has come to some athletes, we want to do better." And all he's been able to say is "my life's been so difficult. This club does really great things and we'll get over this hurdle."

The participants spoke of the impacts of storytelling. Jane stated that it is "really impactful to feel seen by your peers" and that there would have been comfort in feeling understood by others in her community. Alice knew her story mattered; she knew it could help someone experiencing something similar to her:

When you're going through abuse, you convince yourself that it's not as bad as it is. You really push it down, and so validation is definitely part of it. I think that stories are really powerful. So I think that it's powerful to say your story, but it's also powerful when other people get to hear your story. There's power in being vulnerable and honest. And I thought that could maybe inspire other people to be vulnerable and honest and come forward. I thought, maybe there's another 15-year-old girl out there somewhere, and what happened to me is happening to her, and if she hears my story, she'll [think], "oh my God, this is wrong."

She knew it mattered because it would have mattered to her; she shared that she used to scour the internet for a story that felt like hers. She wanted to find something that made her feel less alone, but she was never able to find similar stories to hers.

While pursuing these alternative communication avenues, the participants encountered additional challenges. Alice was contacted by various news and media outlets, but her story never made it to print. For her, this brought back much of what she felt when the perpetrator of her abuse was still coaching her. She explained:

It just made me feel like [the coach] was still winning. He was still [winning] because...I don't know why they didn't continue. I think [the magazine] didn't continue because they were afraid of getting sued or something. And it just was this, oh my God, [he] wins again. I am powerless against him once again. And there is really nothing I can do. I am putting my heart out there, and it doesn't matter.

Jasmine had seen news outlets report on other stories of IV in sport and was frustrated that hers was not getting as much interest. She noted the difficulty of reading “a very similar story and not feel[ing] you got the same respect or attention,” she shared. She described a “very, very disappointing interaction” that felt “invalidating,” during which she provided extensive “evidence” (i.e., emails and reports) and participated in multiple phone calls, only for the journalist she had been talking to stop responding to her.

Survivors who tried unsuccessfully to get their stories out described feeling burnt out and tired. Alice recalled:

I was so tired. I was just tired from all of it because I wasn't just an athlete. I was an activist, an advocate for like...I don't know, for everyone who had been...it was just too much while still trying to [compete] and have fun.

Once they had finished trying to get their story out, they said they no longer had the energy to keep trying and did not want to get hurt or be let down again. Alice recounted, “It was just disappointment, disappointment, disappointment. And then I lost steam. Because what am I even doing this for?” She shared that she became “numb to [her] own story” and encountered feelings similar to those she described following her organization’s handling of the case. “I just don’t feel anything about this anymore. And then it makes you question, does this matter? Is this actually as bad as I think it is, or am I just overdoing it in my head?”

For the participants, the desire for visibility stemmed from disappointment with the organization’s handling of communications and a strong belief in the power and benefits of storytelling. For them, benefits include representation, de-normalizing IV, personal closure, protecting future athletes, and validating past athletes’ experiences. Unfortunately, in the participants’ cases, these benefits were rarely achieved due to a lack of organizational communications, which left them wanting more.

When all is Said and Done, it Does not Feel Done at all

The individuals who participated in this study described more than frustration and disappointment; their experience of organizational communication altered their perception of sport, figures of authority, and life. Some of their relationships suffered; the participants reported tension with people who had supported the perpetrator at any point in the process. Both Beatrice and Alice described conflicting feelings about the sport they once loved. Alice shared:

It’s a really confusing thing to look back on because being in [sport] were some of the best times of my life, but also some of the worst at the same time. And that’s really, that’s a very conflicting feeling, and it’s hard to parse through.

The participants described resenting their organization, their sport, and the people involved in the mismanagement of the complaint. They also described viewing their organizations as inauthentic, no longer trusting them, and struggling to understand how other athletes could proudly represent them. “If I were to go to the website right now, I [would] roll my eyes into the back of my head,” Alice admitted. The words “asinine,” “corrupt,” and “farce” were used to describe the organizations. While some of the participants were still affiliated with their organization and had seen improvements over time, others described “hating” them and said they discourage others with children from joining.

In some cases, this disdain was more generalized; the participants described developing a general distrust of organizations or people in positions of authority that extended well beyond their original site of abuse. Beatrice shared that the IV she experienced as a child translated into struggles with authority in her teenage and young adult life.

I felt like I was mad at the people who were supposed to be protecting me from [IV] when I was younger, to the point where as soon as someone said something that I felt was rude I was like, “I don't know if you understand, but what you just said came across so rude to me.” And I'm just 14 and they're [wondering]...what is happening? But I just became this brat, almost because I was like, “You people are supposed to be protecting me. And you didn't and this is the outcome of it. So, if you don't like it, I don't really know what to tell you.”

Noah believes that going through IV, followed by a situation where you feel silenced, makes you more prone to manipulation in the future, as you end up distrusting yourself and thus giving others power over you. She now trusts people less and does not trust institutions to get things right. Jane feels similarly:

I don't trust organizations to just be good enough. I'm preparing myself to be disappointed, and my standards are a lot lower, but that doesn't mean that I've stopped caring. I still very much care. But I don't let myself get into pits of despair about it because...It's just the way the world is.

The participants described struggling to move on when organizational communication was perceived as insufficient, with some identifying storytelling as a potential source of closure. The participants also described storytelling as a possible “silver lining,” as something positive that could emerge from a difficult experience. “There has to be meaning that comes from [experiencing IV]. I was like, well, maybe this is the meaning. Maybe it's that our story, my story, gets out there and real change can happen,” explained Alice. “I needed there to be meaning behind it. Because to me, that's how a story has to wrap up, there's the silver lining, the meaning,” she continued. Jesse wanted to get a clearer picture of the sporting environment she was part of; she wanted to know what had happened and believed it could have helped her move on. She explained:

I've gone through quite a few years of therapy, and I still go to a therapist occasionally. And I think a lot of the way I am now mentally roots back to how I was raised and the sports that I was in because they were so demanding and high-pressure. I still have a lot of that pressure on me now, but to just really get a true picture of that and to have that understanding, OK, you're not actually messed up...to have a little bit of a back story into why I maybe think the way I do now would always be helpful.

In this section, we have outlined numerous ways athletes experienced organizational communication following IV cases, as well as the long-lasting ramifications that can result from these experiences. In the words of one of the study participants, the experience of organizational

communications following an IV case, can feel like “another hurdle.” She elaborated on this point:

The trauma you have from your experience with [the coach] is one thing, and then having your organization almost silence you is just kind of the nail in the coffin. It really magnifies all those feelings that you felt in your abuse in a whole other realm. It just re-triggers you, and then to the extent where you're like, oh, am I not worthy of support from this organization? It just ends up being this whole other hurdle that you have to then process in addition to your abuse.

While the exact experiences discussed in this article were varied, they were almost entirely negative. In the following section, we will discuss our interpretations of these experiences and consider them through the lens of CFT.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of athletes’ experiences with, and the impact of, organizational communication following allegations of IV in sport. As outlined in the results, the participants’ narratives revealed notable variation. Despite these differences, common narratives stood out during analysis, including excitement and anticipation, feeling let down, seeking alternative storytelling avenues, and experiencing the lasting effects of organizational communication. Our interpretation of this study’s findings confirms that communications can worsen athletes’ experiences during IV cases by amplifying negative emotions, re-traumatizing survivors, and contributing to feelings of unworthiness. A critical examination of these findings is outlined in the following pages. In this examination, we draw on key tenets of CFT, including power relations, gender relations, resistance, and praxis, to better

understand participants' experiences with CFT. Following this, future directions for research and study limitations are explored.

Power Held by Organizations

Critical feminists are concerned with power that operates through systems and is therefore intangible and difficult to identify (Shaw, 2024). This same type of power is impactful in sport organizations (Coakley, 2017). The participants' stories highlight two roles that communications can play in the power-abuse relationship. First, the way an organization portrays perpetrators can contribute to their perceived power. When athletes witnessed organizations supporting or forgiving abusers, they perceived them as becoming more powerful. Second, when athletes felt unsupported by their organization, when organizations downplayed complaints, or when they did not acknowledge IV in their statements, they felt disempowered. In these scenarios, they also described feeling that their perpetrator was "winning" and suggested that feeling silenced could increase vulnerability and the likelihood of being taken advantage of in the future. These accounts can be situated within broader discussions of power in sport, particularly the power held by cis-men, which has been linked to the persistence of environments described as "old boys' clubs" (Markula & Knoppers, 2024). The stories shared by athletes who have experienced IV in sport revealed that organizational communication can play a significant role in maintaining or deepening power relations. This is an occurrence that the participants also described when outlining their experiences with members of the media.

Power Held by the Media

Initially, this study focused on athletes' experiences with communication from their affiliated organizations. However, when invited to share their stories more broadly, the participants frequently discussed the role of media. In many cases, they felt the media could help

bring their experiences to the attention of the broader public. This approach has proven effective for athletes in other cases. For example, Madden & Alt (2021) found that during the Larry Nassar scandal, athletes' voices were not represented in organizational communications, but were present in media coverage. In this case, survivor impact statements and storylines that focused on the lasting impacts of abuse served as powerful vehicles for communicating survivors' experiences. However, not all participants in the present study were equally successful in having their stories shared through the media. When their stories were rejected or dropped by journalists, the participants described experiences that closely mirrored those associated with abuse, including feelings of disempowerment, gaslighting, sadness, and frustration. They described a sense that their abuser was "winning all over again" and suggested that media engagement could, in some cases, perpetuate these dynamics.

There is evidence that the media can also perpetuate power dynamics when publishing stories related to survivors of sexual violence. For example, Dubé and colleagues' (2026) study of media narratives surrounding male athletes who perpetrated sexual violence found that media narratives prioritized image repair for teams over a focus on survivors. Additionally, they found that media focused on the challenges that sexual violence accusations pose for accused athletes and their teams, rather than the impacts of this violence on survivors (Dubé et al., 2026). In these cases, the media highlighted accused athletes' sporting talent, social status, and income but provided little to no commentary on the impact of the sexual violence on survivors. Among other factors, the authors of this paper highlighted a "significant imbalance of power stemming from the social status of the aggressor as compared to the survivor, reinforced by persistent gender inequalities within society" (p. 2066). They also discussed the role of hegemonic masculinity in sport sexual violence cases, and argued that the media's portrayal of accused athletes in a

positive light and their apparent disregard for survivors can play a role in maintaining rape culture in sport. Although this example focuses on male athlete perpetrators of abuse rather than on women athlete IV survivors, it nevertheless provides insight into how media coverage may contribute to power imbalances between perpetrators and survivors.

The experiences described by our study's participants, as well as existing literature, point to the media's ability to reinforce the marginalization of already disempowered individuals. The participants' accounts of challenges with the media fall outside the scope of our study, which was designed to focus on organizational communication. Nevertheless, experiences with the media emerged as an important topic across participants' narratives. Research exploring IV survivors' interactions with the media, particularly how power dynamics shape these experiences, remains limited. As such, we suggest this as an important area for future research.

Gaslighting, Power and Gender

While gaslighting can occur in a range of contexts, it is widely understood as a gendered experience as it both draws on and reinforces constructions of feminized irrationality and often relies on forms of social power typically possessed by men (Sweet, 2019). Gaslighting can be understood as a component of misogyny, as it reinforces patriarchal norms, including discouraging women from accusing men of harm (Stark, 2019). Feeling "gaslit" was a recurring theme across participant interviews. The participants described interpreting organizational minimization or dismissal of abuse as a form of gaslighting. Similarly, when organizations were unclear in their stance on IV or on what the participants had experienced, these responses were also perceived as gaslighting. This often led to what the participants described as "gaslighting themselves," whereby they began to doubt, judge, and second-guess their own experiences. This aligns with academic definitions of gaslighting as a form of psychological manipulation that

leads individuals to doubt their own reality or feel “crazy” (Klein et al., 2025; Sweet, 2019). Furthermore, gaslighting has been associated with many of the outcomes described by the participants, including emotional instability and a loss of agency (Klein et al., 2025). While the participants’ experiences of gaslighting by individual perpetrators more closely align with definitions of manipulative gaslighting (Stark, 2019), which imply malicious intent, there are also important parallels between this type of gaslighting and what the participants experienced as a result of harmful organizational communication. It has been argued that gaslighting requires a power imbalance (Stark, 2019; Sweet, 2019), which may stem from social power or leverage (Stark, 2019). Gaslighting becomes possible within power-imbalanced relationships and broader inequitable systems (Sweet, 2019). The participants’ accounts highlighted the role of power in both their experiences of IV and organizational communication. The participants’ descriptions of feeling gaslit, in relation to both their experiences and the existing literature, highlight an additional set of negative outcomes shaped by the role of power in athletes’ experiences of organizational communications.

Gendered Experiences of Speaking Out

The participants in this study all identify as women and competed in women’s sport. As such, it is important to consider the broader sociocultural context in which their experiences occurred. Similar to wider society, sport often privileges hegemonic masculinity (Krane & Prewitt-White, 2025). Characteristics that are perceived as inherently masculine (e.g., aggressiveness, emotional toughness) are used to maintain a social hierarchy by which women and gender diverse people are seen as lesser (Krane & Prewitt-White, 2025). Consequently, women may be positioned as outsiders because their presence is perceived as challenging the masculine norms embodied in most sports (Krane & Prewitt-White, 2025). █

Viewed through this lens, the participants' experiences following disclosures of IV can be understood as occurring within broader systems of gendered power. Despite occupying less powerful positions within the sport system, participants sought to challenge existing power structures in pursuit of change. For most participants, speaking out represented the first step toward seeking that change. Many participants described feeling let down when the outcomes of speaking did not align with their expectations. This was compounded by a lack of communication from organizations, or by communications that did not meet athletes' needs, which put participants in vulnerable positions, undermined their ability to train, isolated them, and, in some cases, hindered their relationships with staff and teammates. They recounted experiences of public scrutiny, social isolation, and emotional distress associated with sharing their experiences of IV, suggesting that coming forward carried significant risks with limited perceived benefit.

These accounts are consistent with feminist scholarship examining the challenges of speaking out against inequity. For instance, Ahmed (2023) wrote, "If you don't go with the flow, you become an obstacle, getting in the way of the progression of others" (p. 39). The participants' accounts resonated with this concept, as many described attempting to challenge wrongdoing and broader cultural norms within their sport. In doing so, and in pushing for their stories to be told, they resisted current structures held in place by what they described as "abusive men and their sidekicks" and normalized practices within their environments. However, in going against the flow, the participants described being positioned as disruptive or as challenging what others viewed as an accepted part of sport. The participants described feeling out of place in environments that had once felt safe and being treated as though they were overreacting and making a scene. Further, the way their organizations communicated left them

feeling like “nuisances,” rather than changemakers. Support from organizations, through public communications that acknowledge participants’ experiences with IV and their reasons for coming forward, could have prevented much of the harm caused. Based on our interpretation of the data, it is possible that his prioritization of hegemonic masculinity and its associated characteristics, such as emotional toughness over traits like vulnerability and even pain, is a manifestation of patriarchal control that made the process of speaking out and sharing stories of IV difficult (Krane & Prewitt-White, 2025).

Praxis

CFT calls for a focus on praxis and social change. While this study was exploratory, the participants' experiences provided a deeper understanding of the potential impact of organizational communications on IV survivors, which is pertinent to future research and the work of crisis communicators. The participants’ accounts laid the groundwork for future projects to promote survivor well-being. From an organizational communications perspective, participants' experiences demonstrated how communication can affect athletes, suggesting that communicators should consider the impact of their work on athletes who have experienced IV. To reduce potential harm, decisions about whether to communicate, what to say, and how to say it can be made with the knowledge that the communication can harm athletes. The distress described by the participants highlights why support for athletes should extend beyond their experience of IV. Specifically, athletes' interactions with communication systems are likely to cause harm; athletes’ rights, mental health, and healing need to be prioritized throughout all associated processes. While progress has been made, IV in sport still occurs; therefore, supporting athletes after they have experienced IV remains crucial.

Future Directions

There is significant room for further research in this area. First, all of the participants in this study were either completely or mostly dissatisfied with how their organization handled their case. It would be worthwhile comparing this with situations in which athletes have had positive perceptions of their experiences. Second, we did not explicitly ask athletes to tell us exactly what their organization did. While most of the participants walked us through it, we focused more on how they felt than on an accurate recording of what the organization did. Examining how certain specific communication approaches (e.g., bolstering, denial, corrective action) make the participants feel could add further nuance to this conversation. Third, most of the participants in this study knew a complaint alleging IV had been submitted, which affected their feelings before the complaint (e.g., excitement, anticipation) and the emotional fallout following unsatisfactory responses. An exploration of the differences in experiences between athletes who knew a complaint has been made and those who did not could also deepen our understanding of the factors at play. Fourth, the homogeneity of the sample is a limitation of this study; the participants all identified as women, competed in women's sport, were able-bodied, and were predominantly white. Conducting this investigation with athletes who identify as men and other groups of athletes who experience marginalization (e.g., Black, Indigenous, queer, trans, and athletes with disabilities) is an important next step that would allow for further analysis of the societal factors that shape athletes' experiences of organizational communication following IV in sport.

Conclusion

This study, grounded in the experiences of athletes who underwent IV in sport, provided an improved understanding of how organizational communications following an IV case can

affect survivors. The findings highlight athletes' experiences and focus on their excitement ahead of the expected release of statements, as well as the many feelings they experienced in the immediate aftermath of the publication or omission of organizational communications, including letdown, frustration, hurt, distrust, and anger. The findings also explore the decision many athletes made to share their stories with media outlets, as well as the long-term repercussions the participants described after their pursuit of organizational communications ended. Additionally, a consideration of the tenets of CFT allowed us to deepen our understanding of the way power contributes to athlete experiences of organizational communication. Through our analysis of participant accounts, we have demonstrated that communications following an IV-related case are not neutral; rather, they are power-laden and can have lasting effects on IV survivors.

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**Chapter Three: Crisis Communication in Interpersonal Violence Cases in Sport: An
Athlete-Centred Perspective**

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore what communications athletes who have experienced IV in sport want to hear following an IV-related complaint. Building on existing research on crisis communication in sport, survivor-centred crisis communication, and employing situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), this study highlights considerations for crisis communicators based on the experiences of athletes who have experienced interpersonal violence (IV) in sport. We developed these considerations through a narrative inquiry study in which we conducted narrative interviews with eight athletes who described the communication they wanted to receive from their sport organization following an IV-related complaint. We analyzed the data collected during interviews thematically, which led to the development of six narrative themes that can inform and guide sport crisis communication strategies. These themes included: (1) involving survivors, (2) handling cases with care, (3) ensuring communication occurs, (4) clearly communicating organizational stance, (5) carefully considering apologies, and (6) maintaining transparency. We developed a short story using the creative nonfiction method to showcase these considerations, including their applicability and potential impact on practice. The story is followed by an in-depth discussion of the findings and their implications for both theory and practice.

Introduction

Interpersonal violence (IV) occurs at rates ranging from 44% to 86% in sport (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). IV is defined by Krug and colleagues (2002) as

the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. (p. 5)

When sport organizations receive a complaint from an athlete alleging IV, they must make many rapid decisions. Among these decisions, organizations must consider how they will communicate with affected parties (e.g., complainants, respondents, other athletes, staff, and the public) and which channels they will use (e.g., press releases, social media, emails, press conferences). This decision-making process is part of the sport organization's crisis communication efforts. While there is a breadth of research on the public's perception of communication responses in sport (e.g., Brown et al., 2015; Frederick et al., 2021; Iachizzi, 2025), athletes' perceptions of communication approaches following IV cases are largely absent from the literature. The purpose of this study was therefore to explore what communications athletes who have experienced IV in sport want to hear following an IV-related complaint.

We approached this exploration from a constructivist stance, using narrative inquiry with SCCT as a theoretical framework. SCCT was used to guide the design, frame the research question, and interpret participants' perceptions of crisis communications in this project. In this context, it is used as an interpretive tool rather than a strict analytical framework. We conducted narrative interviews with eight participants who experienced IV in sport, which led us to develop considerations for communications practitioners responding to such cases. As will be discussed

later, much of what participants raised is complementary to SCCT, while other concepts highlight areas for its expansion. These considerations are presented through a short creative nonfiction story that illustrates their applicability and potential impact on both IV survivors and organizations.

Crisis communication research and practice often prioritize organizational reputation over the needs and experiences of those directly affected by a crisis. Given this gap, we explored shifting crisis communication efforts to consider athlete well-being alongside organizational reputation. Through our analysis and discussion, we examined how this shift could benefit both survivors of IV and organizations responding to allegations of IV in sport. Crisis communication in sport, survivor-centred communications, and trauma-informed approaches to research are discussed in the following section to further contextualize this study.

Literature Review

Throughout this article, we used the term “organizational communication” to describe what athletes experienced. We made this selection because it is broad and encompasses any type of communication from an organization. However, the focus of the following literature review is crisis communication, a subset of organizational communication that more accurately describes the processes shaping organizational responses during IV cases, which typically present as organizational crises.

Crisis Communication in Sport

Over the past few decades, crisis communications and sport have begun to intersect. As such, scholars have analyzed sport crisis communication responses by applying image repair theory (IRT; Benoit, 1995) as well as situational crisis communication theory (SCCT; Coombs, 2007) to a variety of sport-related scandals (e.g., Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Brown et al., 2020;

Fortunato, 2008; Frederick et al., 2021; Pfahl & Bates, 2008). In a few instances, these theories have been applied to cases in which organizations have publicly acknowledged the outcome of an IV case (e.g., Frederick et al., 2021; Meadows & Meadows, 2020). These studies have led to key insights about how existing crisis communications frameworks apply to sport. First, as in broader crisis communications work, understanding a crisis and its associated risks, and selecting a response based on situational analysis, are effective in sport (Brown et al., 2020). Second, strategies such as bolstering, denial, and attacking the accuser have been largely unsuccessful in sport (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Brazeal, 2008). Lastly, corrective action, mortification, and defeasibility have been more effective than other image repair strategies (Brown et al., 2020; Frederick et al., 2021; Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2011).

The types of scandals that have been studied in sport range from poor team performance to substance use, doping, cheating, and allegations of athlete sexual misconduct (Benoit, 2018; Frederick & Pegoraro, 2023). Researchers have primarily focused on cases in which a single athlete's reputation is at risk (e.g., following a doping scandal or a cheating allegation) and have rarely considered the public's perspective (Brown et al., 2020). Crisis communication scholars have identified factors that make sport crises distinct from other contexts in which SCCT and IRT are used, including the many public actors involved, the visibility of athletes, the presence of engaged fan communities, and the political economy surrounding sport (Coombs, 2018; Koerber & Zabara, 2017). These scholars have also suggested that sports crises do not typically result in monetary loss or operational disruption. While this may seem beneficial for sport organizations, it often leads to reduced response efforts. Although communication strategies used in the wake of IV cases have begun to be analyzed through a crisis communication lens, attention to complainants' experiences of these communications remains limited.

Survivor-Centred Crisis Communication

Despite acknowledging that crises create victims who suffer as a result (Schoofs et al., 2022), few researchers have explored an insider's perspective, and even fewer explore a survivor's perspective. Macnamara (2021), Abbas and Miller (2025), and Schoofs and colleagues (2022) are examples of authors who have produced work that sheds light on an internal perspective of crisis communication. In these cases, the perspectives of people who contributed to crisis communications (i.e., crisis communication practitioners, senior decision-makers, emergency managers, and health professionals) were collected. While these studies did not delve into survivors' perspectives, they provided valuable insights into many of the challenges crisis communicators face. They also offer insightful suggestions for modifications and expansions to existing crisis communication theory.

Other researchers have made strong cases for survivor-centred crisis communication approaches. As an example, in their 2021 publication, Madden and Alt examine the case of Larry Nassar. Larry Nassar was a medical doctor who sexually abused athletes over decades. Nassar was involved with a number of organizations (i.e., Michigan State University, U.S.A. Gymnastics, and the U.S. Olympic Committee); these organizations' responses, as well as media coverage from Nassar's sentencing hearing, were analyzed as part of Madden and Alt's work. They argue that athlete voices were absent from the communications issued by organizations and that the communications surrounding the Larry Nassar case did not demonstrate an ethics of care for survivors and that organizations often choose crisis communications strategies that do not centre the needs of crisis-affected individuals. An ethics of care perspective centres on the well-being of crisis-affected individuals and argues that organizations should acknowledge their role in crises that cause harm rather than simply blaming "one bad apple," as this approach fails to

address the deeper issues that allow “bad apples” to thrive within organizations. Drawing on this observation, they theorize about the relevance of applying an ethics-of-care approach to crisis communication in cases of emotional and physical harm. This shift towards organizational responsibility emphasizes prioritizing an ethics of care over an ethics of justice (i.e., a focus on legal responsibilities). Overall, Madden and Alt’s work is part of an interesting development in crisis communication literature that considers more than just the public’s perspective of a crisis communication campaign.

While recent scholarship has begun to consider perspectives beyond those of the general public, IV survivors themselves remain largely absent from communication-focused studies. Our exploration of athletes’ preferences regarding communication practices following IV cases stems from our belief, in line with the work of crisis communication scholars (e.g. Madden & Alt, 2021), that organizations have an ethical responsibility to care for their athletes and to consider their wants and needs in all organizational functions, including communication. The purpose of this study was to explore what communications athletes who have experienced IV in sport want to hear following an IV-related complaint. This exploration was achieved by using a trauma-informed approach (TIA) to conduct a narrative inquiry study with current and former athletes who experienced IV in sport. Thematic narrative analysis was then used to interpret the results, which are presented herein as a short story.

Theoretical Framework

In SCCT, a crisis is defined as “a violation of salient stakeholder expectations that can create negative outcomes for stakeholders and/or the organization” (Coombs, 2019, p. 3). To address such situations, SCCT offers one of the earliest prescriptive approaches to crisis communication and can be used to predict how relevant parties will respond to crisis

communication strategies (Coombs et al., 2021). In their work on SCCT, Coombs and colleagues (2021) stated that the key factor of SCCT is how people attribute responsibility; the more responsibility attributed to an organization in a crisis, the more reputational damage it is likely to suffer. The first step in SCCT is to assess the anticipated attribution of responsibility for a crisis by categorizing the crisis and considering contextual factors that can affect people's perception of responsibility. Coombs (2020) categorized crises into three crisis clusters: the victim crisis cluster, the accidental crisis cluster, and the preventable crisis cluster. Victim crises (e.g., natural disasters) and accidental crises (e.g., technical errors) are associated with low levels of responsibility attribution. On the other hand, preventable crises (e.g., human error that causes harm, accidents, or disasters) are likely to result in strong attribution of responsibility. Management misconduct and scandals, which occur when management intentionally exploits interest-holders, are other examples of preventable crises (Coombs et al., 2021). Paracrises, a more recent addition to SCCT, are social media or reputational crises that often involve the spread of misinformation. They typically emerge when an organization is publicly accused of irresponsible behaviour.

In addition to crisis type, SCCT emphasizes the importance of contextual factors that can affect interest holders' perceptions of a crisis. The two contextual factors highlighted in SCCT are crisis history and prior relational reputation (Coombs et al., 2021), both of which are considered intensifying factors when assessing reputational risk (Coombs, 2007). According to SCCT, as interest-holders assign more responsibility to an organization after a crisis, their perceptions of the organization are likely to worsen (Coombs et al., 2021). Once these contextual factors and interest-holder attributions have been assessed and the crisis has been classified, organizations can select an appropriate response strategy (Coombs et al., 2021).

According to Coombs and colleagues (2021), the first step in any SCCT crisis response strategy should be to provide an “ethical base” response (Coombs et al., 2021). This step involves informing interest-holders of any remaining risk or instructing them to take protective measures to reduce their risk of harm (Coombs, 2020). In the case of abuse in sport, this could mean suggesting that athletes and the perpetrator avoid contact. Once an ethical base response is provided, additional response strategies can be selected and employed to reduce the risk of damage (Coombs et al., 2021).

There are four crisis response strategies in SCCT (i.e., deny, diminish, rebuild, and bolster). Denial strategies are used when the objective is to escape responsibility, such as attacking the accuser, denying the claim, or shifting blame (Coombs et al., 2021). Similarly, diminishment should be selected to reduce perceived responsibility and can be achieved by making excuses to deny intent or control over events, or by justifying the crisis (Coombs et al., 2021). An organization that chooses a rebuilding response can take action to help crisis survivors, including offering an apology or compensation (Coombs et al., 2021). Finally, bolstering, which can be done by reminding the public of the organization’s past accomplishments, praising interest-holders, or portraying the organization as a victim, is used to help an organization appear in a better light (Coombs et al., 2021).

SCCT was selected to support the analysis as it is well-suited for assessing responses provided on behalf of organizations, given its organizational perspective (Brown et al., 2020). Additionally, it has been widely applied to sport crisis analyses. SCCT was included to ensure that the knowledge produced in this study could be used by communications professionals alongside existing crisis communication frameworks, thereby enhancing its practical usability. In line with a constructivist epistemology and narrative methodology, SCCT was used to link to

existing literature to the study's findings but did not guide the specific interview questions, as topics were left to the interviewees' discretion. Following participants' lead allowed for the representation of results that were important to them and better aligned with survivors' needs. Additionally, it enabled analysis that goes beyond SCCT.

Methods

Starting with a Trauma-informed approach (TIA)

The very act of interviewing trauma survivors can re-traumatize them (Isobel, 2021) or, conversely, empower them and contribute to their healing (Delker et al., 2020), depending on how the interview is approached and conducted. Therefore, we chose to employ a TIA to support research participants' well-being while simultaneously gathering high-quality research data (Crosby et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2023). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014) defines TIAs as follows:

A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to resist re-traumatization actively. (p. 9)

TIAs are used to reduce the risk of re-traumatization of all involved parties (SAMHSA, 2014). The authors of SAMHSA's TIA (2014) identify six key principles in their model: (1) safety, (2) trustworthiness and transparency, (3) peer support, (4) collaboration and mutuality, (5) empowerment, voice, and choice, and (6) cultural, historical, and gender issues. Drawing on the work of numerous scholars (e.g., Crosby et al., 2023; Hargrove et al., 2024; Isobel, 2021; Voith et al., 2020), we embedded these principles throughout the study design. The result is a flexible,

individualized approach that fits this project and embeds the six key principles of a TIA at every step.

Positionality

We approached this study from a constructivist perspective. Constructivists emphasize the value of individual perspectives in constructing meaning (Crotty, 1998), a belief that was central to this research project. In keeping with our constructivist epistemology, we will briefly acknowledge how our subjectivity and positionality shaped this project. The first author competed in track and field for many years, during which she witnessed and experienced IV in sport. She later worked in sports marketing and communications, in which she worked on cases related to IV in sport. She chose to disclose her experience of IV to participants to foster comfort, reduce feelings of judgment, and minimize any anticipated power imbalances. Despite her own experience, the aim of this project was not to represent her beliefs, but rather to gather multiple perspectives and produce an article that would be helpful to survivors of IV in sport affected by organizational communications. The second author brought professional experience of supporting athletes through IV cases to this project. As a certified mental performance consultant, she has routinely assisted athletes in navigating disclosures, reporting procedures, and organizational responses to IV. She has also worked for several years as an abuse-free sport helpline operator and educator, providing guidance, resources, and prevention-focused training to individuals and sport organizations. These roles have shaped her understanding of how organizational communication can affect survivors' experiences and recovery.

To mitigate how their experiences might shape interpretation of survivor experiences, both authors engaged in shared reflexive practices throughout the research process. They held regular reflexive discussions to surface assumptions, monitored their reactions to participant

narratives, and discussed preliminary interpretations. The first author maintained a reflexive journal and adhered to a pre-established self-care plan to support trauma-informed engagement with the data. These collaborative practices helped ensure that the authors' lived experiences informed, but did not dominate, the construction of meaning in this study.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry, a methodology typically underpinned by interpretive epistemologies such as constructivism (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007; Williams & Brighton, 2024), involves collecting and analyzing personal stories, which offer rich context, deep subjectivity, and nuanced explanations (Papathomas, 2016). A key tenet of narrative inquiry is that people make sense of their lives through stories, and narrative inquiry involves collecting and analyzing these stories to study experiences (Clandinin, 2006). To gather stories, we conducted narrative interviews as described below and prioritized collecting deep, nuanced accounts. To do this, we encouraged participants to tell their stories in great detail. The stories studied through narrative inquiry are deeply personal and shaped by interactions with others, providing insight into the storyteller's social world (Smith, 2010). The stories our participants shared had these same characteristics and allowed us to understand both their personal and contextualized experiences of IV and communications, as well as how their social interactions shaped much of what they experienced. When analyzing the data collected through a narrative inquiry lens, it was possible to see themes that ran through individual stories as well as across the set of stories. As narrative inquiry researchers, we focused on personal rather than objective truths (Papathomas, 2016) and presented our findings accordingly.

We approached this study first as story analysts, by conducting an analysis of the participants' narratives (Smith & Sparkes, 2021). We then moved back and forth between the

role of story analyst and storyteller. As storytellers, we theorized and conveyed our interpretation through a story (Smith & Sparkes, 2021). In this study, collecting participants' stories enabled us to gain a deep, nuanced understanding of their experiences with organizational communication. Narrative inquiry allowed us to centre subjectivity and to illuminate perspectives and challenges that we did not anticipate prior to data collection.

Data Collection

Following approval from the University's Research Ethics Board, purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit eight participants. To participate in this study, individuals were required to (1) be current or former athletes, (2) have experienced IV during their time in sport, (3) have been affiliated with a team, club, or organization that received a complaint regarding IV, and (4) be over the age of 18. Athletes who did not make formal complaints were included in the study, as we recognized that not all survivors choose to come forward. Furthermore, the complaint discussed by a participant need not have been made public, as an organization's decision not to do so typically results from a communication planning process. Participants were between 24 and 31 years old, all identified as women, and participated in artistic swimming, basketball, gymnastics, track and field, rowing, and rugby. Four participants were current athletes, while the other four has been retired for up to 9 years. Participants experienced IV while competing at high school, provincial, university, national, and international levels of sport.

We invited all participants who expressed interest in the study first to join a pre-participation call. The details of the call were informed by SAMHSA's (2014) concepts of safety, empowerment, voice, and choice, and by the work of other researchers who applied this framework (e.g., Crosby et al., 2023; Isobel, 2021; McMahon et al., 2023; Papathomas et al.,

2024). The aim of the call was to be transparent about research goals, processes, and outcomes as this can help build safety by reducing surprises (Papathomas et al., 2024), to provide participants with choice around the details of their participation (i.e., location, duration of interview, participating alone or with a peer), and to ensure participants could make an informed decision about their involvement.

Following this call, we conducted narrative interviews with each participant. The interviews lasted between 58 and 104 minutes and were split into two phases: the narration phase and the conversation phase (Kim, 2016). Narrative interviews are open-ended and typically start with the interviewer asking one broad question to encourage the interviewee to tell their story (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Kim, 2016). In line with the key tenets of narrative interviewing (e.g., Kim, 2016), interviewees were encouraged to control the content and direction of the interview. The interviewer made every effort to step back and relinquish much of the power typically held by an interviewer (Kim, 2016). Following the interviews, transcripts were anonymized and transcribed verbatim. Participants were then asked to review their transcripts and choose their own pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Data were then analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. The analysis was approached iteratively, with multiple revisits to the transcriptions. At this stage, the authors acted as story analysts and focused on the *whats*, or the content of participants' stories (Esin, 2011; Smith, 2017). We used thematic narrative analysis to develop central themes within stories and their relationships, and then turned to storytellers to present the findings and continue the analysis throughout the writing process. A shift to storytelling enabled the production of an emotion-laden, compelling story. We expect this will resonate with a broad audience, extending the

impact of this work beyond academia. Additionally, participants frequently expressed appreciation for storytelling and a desire for their stories to be shared; this creative, analytical approach aims to represent their perspectives and honour their expressed needs.

Creative Nonfiction

Smith and colleagues (2016) described creative nonfiction as “fictional in form yet factual in content” (p. 1). The events, characters, and locations are fictional, yet the ideas, concepts, and beliefs represented are factual. This approach ensured participants’ anonymity, showed theory, and resulted in an evocative product that embraces emotionality and encourages multiple interpretations (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Throughout the interviews, the participants described the communications they wanted to receive from their sport organization following an IV-related complaint. Through our analysis of the participants’ stories, we developed six narrative themes. These themes are based on participants’ accounts of what communications they wanted to receive following their IV case. Given that these themes represent the wants of IV-survivors, they can also serve as considerations for crisis communicators developing a survivor-centred crisis communications campaign. Following the development of the six considerations, we wrote a short story using the creative nonfiction method that presents an ideal communication scenario, based on the authors’ interpretations of participants’ descriptions and illustrated through the fictional characters Nat, Claudine, and Jenny.

The views highlighted in this section of the paper do not reflect the exact opinions of each athlete we interviewed, nor those of every IV survivor. For this reason, they are meant to represent verisimilitude rather than a single truth and should be considered as such alongside the viewpoints of the actual individuals involved in a case requiring a crisis community strategy.

Results

Narrative Themes

The six narrative themes, which also serve as considerations for crisis communicators implementing survivor-centred communications, are (1) involving survivors, (2) handling cases with care, (3) ensuring communication occurs, (4) clearly communicating organizational stance, (5) carefully considering apologies, and (6) maintaining transparency. The first theme, *involving survivors*, emphasizes the need for communicators to consult survivors throughout the communication process to ensure their perspectives are heard, their needs are considered, and messaging accurately reflects their experiences, without placing the burden of communication work on them. *Handling cases with care* implies recognizing that survivors may be experiencing significant trauma and developing communications with empathy, sensitivity, and appropriate support mechanisms to minimize the risk of re-traumatization. *Ensuring communication occurs* involves avoiding organizational silence following IV cases, as a lack of communication can harm survivors, create information vacuums, fuel misinformation, and undermine trust in the organization. By *clearly communicating organizational stance*, we mean explicitly acknowledging harmful behaviour, clearly stating the organization's position, and avoiding vague or ambiguous messaging that could invalidate survivors' experiences or create confusion about accountability. *Apologies should be considered carefully*; when appropriate, offer meaningful apologies that acknowledge responsibility, express remorse, and are accompanied by concrete actions rather than empty statements. Lastly, to implement the final consideration, *maintaining transparency*, communicators should provide clear, timely, and honest information, particularly to survivors, about organizational actions, decisions, risks, and communication plans so that affected individuals are not left uncertain or surprised.

As practical considerations, these themes are not necessarily intended to be executed in a specific order. Instead, they should be considered at all stages of crisis communication plan development and execution. The following short story adds nuance to these themes and shows some ways they can be applied in practice to crisis situations.

Creative Nonfiction Shortstory: Nat's Silver, Jenny's Gold

The following creative nonfiction piece draws on themes, experiences, and participant accounts generated through this study. The characters were created to protect the participants' confidentiality while illustrating key findings. Although fictionalized, these narratives reflect patterns identified across the participants' accounts and are intended to bring the study's findings to life while emphasizing the perspectives and experiences of those affected.

Nat is a university student and cross-country runner. After experiencing emotional abuse and sexual harassment from a coach, she filed a complaint that was ultimately dismissed, leaving her feeling invalidated and disillusioned with the reporting process. Years later, she once again found herself training under an abusive coach. Although she chooses to come forward a second time, her past experiences have left her uncertain about what will happen next.

Claudine is a marketing and communications manager for the sport department of a large university. She's been asked to lead the crisis communication efforts following the dismissal of Nat's coach. Although it is her first time leading this type of campaign, she understands that her job is to protect the university's reputation. At the same time, she is deeply concerned about Nat's well-being and the impact of her work on other IV survivors.

Jenny is a high school-aged swimmer who has been training in a toxic environment for quite some time. Many of the harmful behaviours she experiences have been normalized within her sport, leaving her with limited awareness of what constitutes abuse.

Nat

This is it. I'm done.

I worked so hard to run fast. And then I worked so hard to be what she wanted. I worked so hard at both those things. I thought they went hand in hand.

Then I worked so hard to speak out. I followed the steps. I talked to the people. I wrote the words. But nothing happened.

I went back to working hard at running fast. And somehow, for some reason, to my surprise and shame, I slowly, unknowingly, worked hard at being what yet another coach wanted.

I worked hard until I broke, which was also part of what he wanted. So, I did it again; I worked hard at speaking out. This time it worked; he's gone. But it doesn't feel done. He's gone, but no one knows. I broke, and no one knows. I'm supposed to go back to working hard. But I won't. I gave too much and have nothing to show for it. I gave too much and have nothing left to give.

You're welcome, I think. But no one has ever thanked me.

This is it. I shove my running shoes to the back of my closet. I'm done.

Claudine

The pressure surrounds me. If someone walked in right now, they'd wonder if my shoulders had always been so low on my body. What they wouldn't see is the immense weight pulling me towards the earth's very core.

I'm sitting alone in the boardroom. I thought some privacy would help me work, but instead it's making me feel even smaller – even less equipped to handle this weight. What Nat went through is horrifying. I've been thinking about her ever since yesterday when I was looped in on this case. The good news is that we've fired her coach; the bad news is that I have to figure

out how to announce that to the public; the worse news is that I don't know if it'll ever be enough. If I have enough to give her.

I stare at the templated statement I'm working off. *We are pleased to announce the appointment of Coach Quincy to the role of Head Coach – Cross Country, following the departure of Coach Mark. Coach Quincy comes to us after serving as a long-term assistant coach overseas. He brings over 20 years of coaching experience, a knack for race strategy, and a commitment to teamwork.*

There is so much missing here.

I add in ...*who was dismissed following an internal investigation that found he had emotionally abused and sexually harassed at least one athlete.* That feels good. I'll be damned if he gets hired after this. I draft a few versions of an apology to add to the bottom of the statement. None of it feels quite right. I'm still not sure if I'm doing this justice. Most importantly, where is Nat in this story? Does she want to be in it?

That's when it hits me...only she can answer that.

Nat

I don't know why I'm here. I really don't have anything left to give. I just keep giving – am I doing this to myself? My hand lingers on the doorknob. A hand that looks like mine but doesn't feel like it belongs to me. This isn't right. I get ready to turn around. To flee. To be done.

But the door pulls open, sending a burst of cool air onto my heated skin. My stomach drops; fear settles into my body. Fast.

But I force myself to look at her, to stand tall. Her face is kind, serious, open. She extends her hand, "I'm Claudine. Thank you for meeting with me, and thank you for coming forward. What happened to you wasn't fair; it shouldn't have happened. I know we don't know each other very

well, but I want you to know that I have been thinking about how brave you are for days now. Thank you.”

My stomach somehow drops lower than it had before; my heart races. But it steadies quickly.

And as it does, I accept her handshake. My lip quivers, but I force it to stop. The lump in my throat won’t allow words, but I force a half smile. It’s as if I can feel my walls crumble. I built them so high, but it seems that they were defenceless against the words she so carefully picked.

As we discuss, I let her confidence and gentleness guide me.

She asks me what I want and tells me to be honest. I tell her I need to be believed. I need to be supported. I need a silver lining, something good to come of this.

She takes it all in and assures me that she will do her best. She will give me everything she has.

She leaves our conversation with notes and stories. She leaves me with a timeline: “I will have something for you to look at in a week”.

Despite my best efforts, I let myself hope just a little.

Claudine

This feels right. Nat shared so much of herself, so generously, with me. She went through so much, and it’s clear to me that the outcome matters deeply to her. She was so incredibly reasonable. She was concerned about Coach Mark’s family and reputation... she’s better than me. When she told me that she needed to be believed and supported, I knew I had to do my best to give her that. The silver-lining part feels a bit harder... how can something good come of something so terrible?

I focus first on being believed – I state the coach’s name. I write out Nat’s name. I state clearly that the coach abused her. I share all the details she asked me to. I omit the rest. I keep the tone honest and professional. I make sure it’s palatable to the public, to lawyers, to the media. I take

my time and consider anything people could poke holes in. When I find these, I rework, I clarify, I rework again. Nat deserves a careful eye; she deserves my time.

Then I think about how this statement can support her and other survivors. I know she wasn't the only person hurt by this man, and I know that there are other people like him out there. I provide information about mental health and legal support, which I've confirmed we can act on. I insert information about where to report abuse, and I really hope the right people see this. I thank Nat; I acknowledge her strength as well as the strength of those who have not chosen to come forward. I state in the plainest of language possible that we do not support abuse.

I work with the department on an apology that Nat deserves. This is a challenging day for all of us. We consider the roles we might have played in this. I know a few of us write to her directly, but we also end up with something to include publicly.

The only thing I can't quite figure out is the silver lining. I tell her that.

Nat

My reply to Claudine is short. *Thank you. This is what I needed.*

My reply is short, but her impact is long-lasting. When the story comes out, it feels like closure. I feel like it's mine; she gave me that. I feel like I made something meaningful out of a senseless situation. I work through my experience with Coach Mark, but this time, I don't have to work through the meaning of an organization's silence. I believe the statement because Claudine believed me.

Jenny

I had to lie to my mom about why I got back from practice so late tonight. I told her I got froyo with Jess after the workout, but the truth is I took the long way home... the very, detour-filled, back-road-heavy, long way.

I needed to think. I've just been so confused. Swimming used to be my favourite thing in the world, but now I leave the pool feeling broken every day. I can't put my finger on why. I know something is wrong, but I don't know what. I feel bad, but I don't know why. I usually convince myself that it is in my head.

But today was different. It felt different. I think back to today's practice.

As soon as I feel the wall on the tips of my fingers, I pull my head out of the water and reach for my water bottle. Panting, I glance over the middle lanes towards the clock, desperately hoping those big red numbers would reveal that I could take more than a few seconds of rest. 20 seconds, I can do that. But as I draw my focus back towards my lane, something catches my eye. Nancy is hanging on the wall of the lane beside me, crying. I follow her line of sight and see Coach leaning in ever so slightly as she pleads, *"Please, just an apple. All I want is an apple."* She sounds angry, but her anger is laced with a heavy dose of despair. Coach sees me looking and winks at me. The grin on his face is at odds with Nancy's tear-stricken, blotchy grimace. I force a smile and push back. I swim away, away, away, but after a few strokes I tilt my head slightly and see Nancy swimming sluggishly in the lane beside me. I track her in my peripheral well enough to know she made it through a few more laps before getting out.

Things have been feeling off for a while now, but something about seeing Nancy so desperate has changed the feeling. It's heavy, it's hot. I don't know what to call it; I don't know what it is, but I can't stop thinking about it.

Instead of doing my schoolwork, I end up in a rabbit hole. I start by looking up "coaches restricting eating", and I find a news article with quotes from someone named Nat and links to a statement from her university. She's telling a heart-wrenching story...a story I feel like I already

know. Except I didn't realize how heart-wrenching it was until I read it in her words. I didn't realize that I was a part of a story like this.

Emotional abuse.

Sexual harassment.

I didn't know it wasn't okay for him to say those things; I didn't know it wasn't ok for him to touch me that way. I didn't know there was someone I could talk to about this. I didn't know that it didn't have to be this way.

It's 2 a.m. I lied to my mom about why I got home late tonight, and I'll probably have to lie to my English teacher about why I'm dozing off in class tomorrow morning.

But I think I'll start telling the truth after that. I think I'll speak up.

Nat

I reach for my phone, eyes still closed, muscle memory guiding me towards it, and shut the alarm off. I drift back to a dreamless, blissful sleep until a buzz from my phone wakes me up.

Annoyed, I reach for it, eyes open this time. Who is sending me an email at 7 a.m. I wonder. I read the subject line, and my stomach drops.

"Thank you, your story saved me."

I stare at the screen for a few minutes before opening the email. It's from an 11th grader named Jenny.

My girlfriend, an impressively early riser, gets back from her workout an hour later, and I'm sitting on the floor, digging through the back of my closet. She walks in, talking about the traffic on the way back from Pilates, until she sees me and goes silent, worry creasing her forehead.

I assure her that my tears are happy ones...at least mostly. And I ask her if she'll join me on a run after I forward an email to Claudine. I type two words into the body of my email above Jenny's words: *Silver lining*.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to understand what communication approaches athletes who have experienced IV want to receive from their organization following an IV-related complaint. Analysis of the participants' accounts yielded six recommendations for sport crisis communicators: involving survivors, handling cases with care, ensuring communication occurs, clearly communicating the organization's stance, carefully considering apologies, and maintaining transparency. These recommendations were also explored through a creative nonfiction short story, which was developed to illustrate how a survivor-centred approach to communication might be enacted in practice. In this discussion, we examine each recommendation in relation to existing crisis communication scholarship, consider their implications for more ethical and survivor-centred communication practices, reflect on the value of incorporating athlete perspectives into sport crisis communication research, and discuss persistent gaps between research and practice.

Recommendations for Sport Crisis Communicators

Involve Survivors

Claudine's realization that she cannot write this story without consulting Nat marked a turning point in the narrative. By consulting Nat throughout the process, Claudine helped create the conditions that allowed Nat to support the organization's response, feel heard and identify a silver lining in an otherwise painful experience. This outcome reflects the importance of involving crisis-affected individuals in decisions that affect them. Jong and Brataas (2021)

suggested that reaching out to crisis-affected individuals is the first step in determining how best to meet their needs. Nat's experience demonstrates that consultation can benefit not only the organization but also the crisis-affected individual by fostering feelings of validation, support, and inclusion.

A core concept of SCCT is responsibility attribution. Before determining a crisis response strategy, Coombs (2007) stressed the importance of assessing the extent to which audiences will attribute responsibility for a crisis to an organization. This assessment typically involves understanding how different stakeholder groups perceive and interpret the crisis (Coombs, 2007). One way to gain insight into these perceptions is to engage directly with individuals affected by the event. Survivors, whether considered internal or external stakeholders depending on their relationship with the organization, can offer valuable perspectives on how organizational actions and communications are likely to be interpreted. They may also identify concerns, risks, or information needs that organizations might otherwise overlook.

From an SCCT perspective, incorporating survivors' perspectives may help organizations better understand how responsibility is attributed and how communication strategies are likely to be received by key interest-holders. Such insights may support the development of communication responses that resonate with athletes and reduce the risk of unintended harm, including re-traumatization. We do not suggest that survivors should have complete control over outward-facing statements, nor should they be expected to perform the work of communication professionals. Rather, where survivors wish to be involved, their perspectives can provide valuable guidance throughout the communication process. Therefore, it is important to remain attentive to whose story is being told and to meaningfully consult those affected when developing and implementing communication strategies.

Handle With Care

Claudine was portrayed as approaching her role with a sense of caution and concern for both her work and Nat's well-being. The concept of proceeding with care is central to how she approaches her communications plan and her conversations with Nat. Claudine's efforts to appear kind, serious, and empathetic, and to thank Nat for coming forward, are intentional acts that reflect a survivor-centred approach to communication. The importance of empathy in these scenarios is echoed in the work of Schoofs and colleagues (2022), who interviewed 16 crisis communication practitioners, all of whom unanimously believed that communicating with empathy was important in crises and cited its strategic benefits as a main reason. One benefit of empathy in crisis communication, as described by the study participants, was its positive impact on the organization's reputation, as interest-holders interpret empathy as an indication of the organization's good intentions. They also said messages were more likely to be understood if they first connected with interest-holders, and that showing empathy increases an organization's ability to appear more human. Lastly, the study participants suggested that crisis-affected individuals who are treated with care may speak positively of an organization and therefore reinforce their image repair efforts (Schoofs et al., 2022).

IV in sport has significant impacts on those who experience it. Self-harm, disordered eating, and suicidal thoughts are some of the negative outcomes that have been associated with experiencing IV in sport (Wilson et al., 2022a; Wilson et al., 2022b). Because these harms frequently predate any organizational response, communication surrounding IV cases must account for the reality that survivors may already be dealing with significant trauma. For this reason, athletes who experience IV while affiliated with a sport organization differ greatly from, for example, consumers receiving messaging about a preventive food recall. While the

announcement of a product recall could cause anxiety, the athletes we interviewed had all experienced significant trauma by the time any communication process began. The importance of handling IV cases with care is reflected in the story when Nat exhibits a strong emotional response while preparing to meet Claudine. Her reaction highlights that survivors may enter organizational communication processes already carrying the effects of significant trauma, reinforcing the need for sensitive and trauma-informed communication practices.

Another way organizations can demonstrate this care is through a thoughtful and survivor-centred communication approach. The desire for a balance between supportive and professional communication reflects the need for crisis responses in IV cases to consider survivors' well-being while also protecting or repairing an organization's image. Additionally, Coombs (2010) noted that as a part of SCCT, crisis victims should be provided with trauma counselling when necessary. In reality, none of the participants in this study reported receiving referrals directly from the organization for counselling, and they all considered it necessary. We suggest that organizations consider ways of supporting athletes' well-being beyond access to counselling. Depending on the needs and preferences of those affected, this support may take a variety of forms, including assistance with navigating legal processes, managing public communications, or accessing other relevant resources and services.

Previous researchers have suggested that organizational communication can itself become a source of trauma or re-traumatization for affected individuals (Place et al., 2023). Consistent with this concern, participants in the present study suggested that communication following IV cases requires particular care, sensitivity and attention to survivors' well-being. As one of the first studies to explore survivors' perspectives on crisis communication in sport, this

research highlights the importance of approaching communication not only as a reputational tool but also as a component of survivor support and recovery.

Ensure Communication Occurs

Nat seems incredulous that she spoke out a second time, suggesting that her first experience decreased her likelihood of coming forward again. Further, in the aftermath of Claudine's response, she states that she worked through her experience with Coach Mark, but that this time, she "[doesn't] have to work through the meaning of an organization's silence", suggesting that the implications of organizational silence on an IV survivor can add a layer of harm and trauma.

Although silence has received comparatively little attention in crisis communication literature (Pferner, 2026; Zhuwakinyu, 2025), it emerged as a prominent concern in participants' accounts. In the first monologue, Nat expresses her frustration and sense of defeat after speaking out and receiving no response, an experience that left her feeling invalidated. Organizational silence has been described as a response option misaligned with the field of crisis communications (Zhuwakinyu, 2025), and Nat's experiences show why it also misaligns with what many IV survivors want. Beyond not aligning with survivors' preferences, organizational silence may also perpetuate the normalization of harmful behaviours in sport, which is frequently cited as a contributor to the high prevalence of IV in sport (e.g., Kuhlin & Barker-Ruchti, 2025; Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Conversely, we feel that public-facing communications that explicitly acknowledge certain actions as abusive may help challenge this normalization while validating the experiences of those affected by IV.

There are rare scenarios in which strategic silence might be advantageous to an organization's reputation, such as when it allows the organization time to collect information or

implement internal communication efforts (Zhuwakinyu, 2025). However, the use of silence carries reputational and ethical risks (Zhuwakinyu, 2025), and SCCT argues that the first step in a crisis response strategy is to communicate (Le et al., 2019). Choosing to stay silent following an IV case poses risks for both the survivors and the organization. Failing to control the narrative makes it easy for the public, the accused, and the media to create their own. Rumours can harm an organization's reputation and create public narratives that are inconsistent with individuals' own experiences, causing pain and suffering (Archetti, 2022). Scholars frequently describe the creation of an information vacuum following organizational silence during a crisis, noting that this vacuum quickly fills with disinformation and speculation (e.g. Coombs, 2010; Le et al., 2019; Pang et al., 2022; Zhuwakinyu, 2025). This can result in the spread of misinformation and rumours, as well as the unfounded vilification of survivors, all things experienced by this study's participants. The impact of organizational silence on athletes who have experienced IV is immense and can impact organizational reputation and personal healing. For this reason, we maintain that organizations should avoid using silence as a tactic after instances of IV.

Clearly Communicate Organizational Stance

As she drafts the organization's response, Claudine explicitly names the perpetrator and states that we found that they have emotionally abused and sexually harassed an athlete. She feels that without this being stated plainly, he could re-offend. In the context of schools, it has been suggested that public acknowledgement of harm can strengthen child safeguarding (Crowley et al., 2026). Further, in a study that included interviews with survivors of child sexual abuse, participants shared that acknowledgment of responsibility is a fundamental part of a helpful institutional response (Blunden et al., 2021). Blunden and colleagues' (2021) study found this acknowledgement to include the following three elements: "(a) acceptance that the abuse

took place, (b) the real and detrimental effects on the victim/survivor and (c) the institution's willingness to admit failings or culpability in public" (p. 65). Further, they stated that for the acknowledgement to be meaningful, it had to be public. Based on our interpretation of the participants' experiences and the existing literature, we suggest that a clear organizational stance on IV can validate survivors' experiences and contribute to broader safeguarding efforts within sport organizations.

Consider Your Apology Carefully

The development of an apology was a pivotal moment in Nat and Claudine's story, reflecting participants' desire for organizational responses that acknowledge harm, accept responsibility, and support healing. Crisis communication scholars have long suggested that a public apology is a viable crisis response strategy for repairing image (e.g., Kiambi & Shafer, 2018). In contrast, others have found that people respond similarly to any survivor-centred strategy, including sympathy and compensation (Coombs & Holladay, 2008), and that corrective action is the most effective crisis response strategy (Arendt et al., 2017). Despite this, some organizations shy away from apologizing, opting instead for denial, silence, or other diminutive responses.

Participants' accounts point to the importance of apologies that meaningfully acknowledge harm, accept responsibility, and are accompanied by concrete action. This consideration mirrors what is documented in the literature, in which acknowledging responsibility, pairing apologies with action, and demonstrating remorse are recommended (Bentley & Ma, 2020). Given the breadth of existing literature supporting apologies as an effective communication strategy, and the alignment between participants' perspectives and

existing theory, this finding reinforces rather than extends current understanding. What appears to be lacking is not the theoretical support for apologies, but their practical application.

Be Transparent

In the short story, Claudine intentionally tells Nat when to expect a draft statement for review and sends it to her within the agreed-upon timeline. This small effort can go a long way in giving survivors a sense of control. Transparency with interest-holders, and crisis-affected individuals in particular, is considered an important part of crisis communications (Coombs & Harker, 2021). When approached from an SCCT lens, the first step in any crisis response strategy should be to provide an “ethical base” response (Coombs et al., 2021), which involves informing affected parties of any remaining risk or instructing them to take protective measures to reduce their risk of harm (Coombs, 2020). Coombs (2010) highlights the importance of telling affected staff how a crisis affects their work. The amount of detail and transparency that is shared publicly should be validated with survivors. However, transparency with the survivors themselves, including letting them know when statements will or will not be published, so they are not surprised by either outcome, should be non-negotiable.

Towards Ethical Communications

According to crisis communication theories, such as SCCT, crisis-affected individuals should be prioritized in a crisis (Coombs, 2010a). Building on this principle, scholars have advocated for approaches that centre empathy, care and survivor perspectives (e.g., Madden & Alt, 2021; Schoofs et al., 2022). Despite these recommendations, research has highlighted the exclusion of survivor voices from organizational communications (e.g., Madden & Alt, 2021). The recommendations emerging from this study both reinforce and extend existing crisis communication scholarship.

Several of our recommendations, including communicating with empathy, providing meaningful apologies, and avoiding organizational silence, align with established crisis communication guidance (e.g., Bentley & Ma, 2020; Schoofs et al., 2022; Zhuwakinyu). Other recommendations, however, are less evident in the existing literature. In particular, the participants emphasized the importance of involving survivors in communication processes, clearly communicating organizational stance, and maintaining transparency with interest-holders, highlighting the potential value of adopting a more survivor-centred approach to crisis communication following IV cases.

The success of a sport-related crisis communications campaign is usually judged by its ability to mitigate organizational reputational damage (Madden & Alt, 2021). However, our analysis suggests that this criterion may be too narrow in cases involving IV. The participants consistently described a desire for communication practices that supported their well-being, including being consulted, validated, informed, and treated with care. Accordingly, we believe that athlete well-being could serve as an additional indicator of communication effectiveness. Expanding evaluative criteria beyond reputation management and incorporating survivors' experiences would align with an ethics-of-care approach, which prioritizes the needs and well-being of those harmed by a crisis. It is possible that such an approach may not only support athlete healing but also reduce negative narratives and ultimately contribute to reputational outcomes. Viewed in this way, effective crisis communication following IV is not solely a matter of protecting organizational reputation but also of supporting the well-being of those harmed.

This shift from reputation management to survivor well-being has important implications for crisis communication practice. The results of this study provide communicators with practical guidance for adopting a more ethical and survivor-centred approach to crisis communication.

The considerations, based on survivor experiences and preferences, can be used alongside existing approaches to develop plans that are better aligned with what survivors want and need. Additionally, the short story can help communicators understand how more supportive communications can impact not only their reputation but also survivors' lives, and provide an example of how to implement a survivor-centred communications approach. Rather than evaluating crisis communication solely in terms of reputational outcomes, the findings of this study suggest that athlete well-being should also be considered a key indicator of communication effectiveness following IV cases in sport.

Athlete Perspective in Sport Crisis Communication Research

We believe that including athletes' voices in research on sport crisis communication is a necessary step toward developing ethical approaches to sport crisis communication. To date, however, most sport crisis communication research has focused on public perspectives, often by analyzing social media comments (e.g., Brown et al., 2015; Frederick et al., 2021; Iachizzi, 2025). Outside of sport, a few studies have gathered the perspectives of individuals affected by violent events (McLellan, 1990) and natural disasters (Smith et al., 2012). Despite the prevalence of IV in sport and the frequency of organizational communications responding to IV-related incidents, the perspectives of IV-affected individuals have remained largely absent in sport crisis communication literature. In this study, the collection of IV-affected athletes' perspectives enabled a deeper understanding of the potential harms associated with organizational communication, the practices survivors prefer, and the considerations they find most helpful. Understanding how organizational communications can cause harm is essential to preventing it; therefore, lived experience should be recognized as a critical source of knowledge in the development of survivor-centred, ethical approaches to crisis communication.

Gaps in Practice

Throughout this discussion, we have highlighted communication practices that are suggested in theory. Through our analysis of the participant data, it became evident that these are often not implemented in practice. Ineffective knowledge translation (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016), a belief that theoretical recommendations are too rigid and cannot be applied to every circumstance (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016), the production of research deemed not useful to practitioners (Markides, 2011), and legal limitations (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016) are among the likely reasons for this occurrence. Knight and colleagues (2020) developed a step-by-step visual model for sport crisis managers, based on SCCT, in acknowledgment of their underpreparedness to respond to crises, due in part to the factors mentioned above, as well as the many inherent challenges of responding to sport crises, such as unpredictability. Similarly, we presented the results of this study using simple, flexible considerations and by providing an illustrative example that we hope will ease the application of an ethical and survivor-centred approach for sport crisis communicators.

Conclusion

This study contributes to several future research directions, although it is not without limitations. First, the participant sample was relatively homogeneous. Future research could explore the perspectives of athletes from more diverse gender, sexual orientation, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Second, although participants' preferences largely aligned with theoretical recommendations for crisis communications, their experiences suggest that these recommendations are not consistently reflected in practice. Exploring the reasons for this incongruence represents an important direction for future research aimed at improving survivors' experiences with crisis communications. Third, while this study explored IV survivors'

perspectives, future research should examine the perspectives of other interest-holders, such as sport administrators, including not only their experiences, but also the challenges they face when developing crisis communication responses. Finally, although this study highlights the specific needs of athletes who have experienced IV, these needs may differ from those of other crisis-affected individuals, such as teammates, who may be more removed from the crisis event. Future research could explore these distinctions and support the development of context-specific crisis communication models that could benefit both communicators and crisis-affected individuals.

Crisis communication scholars have rarely examined an insider perspective on organizational crisis response (Macnamara, 2021). When internal perspectives are considered, focus typically centres on the actors involved in decision-making processes, such as senior executives, staff, and crisis communication practitioners (e.g., Macnamara, 2021; Schoofs et al., 2022). Beyond this, SCCT acknowledges the importance of survivor-centred communication, and some authors have theorized the importance of crisis communication that centres on survivors of abuse (e.g., Jong & Brataas, 2021; Madden & Alt, 2021). The present study is the first to derive crisis communication recommendations directly from the experiences of survivors of IV in sport. In this paper, we expanded the existing sport crisis communication literature by exploring athletes' perspectives on crisis communication cases following incidents of IV in sport. We used athletes' ideas and stories to showcase what they believe could have improved their experience of organizational communication following their IV case. The study resulted in six recommendations for crisis communication following IV cases: handle communications with care, clearly communicate the organizational stance, involve survivors, carefully consider your apology, ensure communication occurs, and be transparent when managing IV cases. In summary, the findings suggest that a survivor-centred, ethical approach to sport crisis

communications that prioritizes survivor well-being has the potential to support both survivor experience and organizational reputation.

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Chapter Four: Conclusions

During my master's research, I explored the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced interpersonal violence (IV) in sport. I approached this research from a constructivist standpoint and used narrative inquiry as a methodology. To collect data, I conducted narrative interviews with athletes who had experienced IV in sport. Following interviews, I analyzed the data using thematic narrative analysis (TNA). I aligned this study with key constructs of a trauma-informed approach (TIA) and engaged with situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) and critical feminist theory (CFT) throughout the project's design and analysis phases. I presented the results of the data analysis in two publishable papers. In the first, I explored the participants' experiences with and the impact of organizational communication, while in the second, I examined preferred approaches to organizational communication, informed by the participants' recommendations and perspectives, following cases alleging IV.

In this fourth and final chapter of this thesis, I discuss the results from both papers together, shedding light on the studies' overall impacts. I then discuss the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of this work. After highlighting these contributions, I offer a reflection on the study's limitations and considerations for future directions.

Theoretical, Methodological, and Practical Contributions of this Research

I began this project with the hope of contributing, in a small way, to improving communication processes so that they do not further harm athletes who have experienced IV. The result of this project is a nuanced understanding of the extent of harm that non-survivor-centred communication processes can cause. I hope this understanding will lead to improved awareness and practices, as well as more research in this new and evolving space. In the next

sections, I discuss the contributions of this research and how it may shape the experiences of IV survivors.

Communications are a Potential Source of Harm

In the second chapter of this thesis, which constitutes the first publishable paper, I explored athletes' experiences of organizational communications in sport following a case of IV. In this paper, drawing on direct quotes from the study participants, I demonstrated that the way an organization communicates can harm athletes who have experienced IV in sport. Specifically, the findings indicated that athletes described feeling hopeful and excited as they anticipated the organizational communication following an IV case. However, the participants described feeling let down and disappointed by their organization's eventual communication. This sense of letdown was described as involving feelings of being gaslit, anger, and shock. In response to this letdown, participants sometimes described feeling the need to take matters into their own hands by seeking alternative avenues for communication. Unfortunately, these efforts often led to disappointment, feeling taken advantage of, and renewed feelings of disempowerment. Over time, participants described a range of negative, lasting repercussions related to their experiences with organizational communication, including difficulty healing and becoming skeptical and distrustful of organizations, sport, and people in positions of authority. From a critical feminist standpoint, I suggested that participants' experiences of coming forward as IV complainants were made difficult, due in part to their identities as women in sport and their acting in opposition to existing norms maintained by patriarchal systems. Additionally, the athletes' experiences with their perpetrators of abuse, as well as with their organizations and the media, were comprised of complicated power relations that frequently marginalized their voices.

In the third chapter (i.e., the second publishable paper), I drew on participants' narrative accounts to develop six considerations for crisis communicators working in the context of IV-related cases. These considerations included involving survivors, handling cases with care, ensuring communication occurs, clearly communicating organizational stance, carefully considering apologies, and being transparent. To illustrate how these considerations can be applied in practice, I used creative nonfiction. As I conducted this analysis, it became apparent that much of what participants wanted aligned with existing research, while a gap remains between theory and practice. Specifically, they expressed a desire for transparent communication, avoidance of organizational silence, sincere, action-oriented apologies, and handling cases with empathy – none of which the participants reported experiencing. While there is a distinction between what is presented in the first and second publishable papers of this thesis, the findings are most impactful when considered in concert.

The findings from these two papers are complementary. In the first one, I shed light on participants' experiences and analyzed them in terms of both individual and societal factors. In the second one, I extended these findings by developing considerations to improve the experience of future athletes who may, unfortunately, encounter situations similar to those described by the participants in this study. These recommendations were developed through the analysis of participants' experiences and informed by my interpretation as a researcher. Together, these findings support the argument that survivor well-being should be considered alongside reputation management when evaluating crisis communications in IV cases.

Athlete Well-Being as a Consideration for Communicators

In the first paper, a strong case is made for the importance of athlete well-being as an indicator of crisis communication performance. Participants' accounts demonstrated that

organizational communications following an IV case can cause harm to athletes who have experienced IV. They described feeling let down, gaslit, and disempowered and expressed anger, sadness, and fear. Additionally, they shared that organizational communications not only resurfaced feelings associated with their abuse, but they also interfered with their healing processes. Further, they described experiences that shed light on how communication processes can perpetuate systems of oppression and harmful power dynamics. Taken together, these findings support the need for more careful consideration of communication practices following IV cases. This need is further reinforced by the long-term impacts described by participants, including distrust of organizations, authority figures, and sports systems, increased skepticism and cynicism, and difficulty trusting themselves and others. These numerous negative side effects of a crisis communication campaign should concern crisis communicators, as they present an ethical risk. Therefore, it is essential to consider the protection of survivor well-being both at the outset of strategy development and as an evaluative measure. While paper one provided the basis for this argument, paper two helped make the case for how it can be done.

In the second paper of this thesis, I illustrated several ways in which crisis communicators and organizations can intentionally support athletes' well-being. The considerations are simple, flexible, and well aligned with SCCT. Moreover, while these considerations prioritize athlete well-being, they do so without apparent risk to the organization's reputation. To demonstrate this, I will discuss each consideration that is not explicitly aligned with existing theoretical recommendations. To begin, the first consideration, handling with care, while not an explicit part of existing crisis communications frameworks, can be achieved in ways that are supported by existing research and theoretical frameworks. This includes providing support and resources to athletes, as supported by SCCT (Coombs, 2010), and communicating

with empathy (Schoofs et al., 2022). Next, although the recommendation that organizations should clearly express opposition to abuse and support for survivors is not explicitly documented in the literature, it is difficult to imagine an organization wishing to be perceived otherwise. Many participants in this study understood that complexities, such as legal processes and labour laws, can limit the extent to which details of a case can be shared. However, participants also suggested ways to protect future athletes and to validate survivors' experiences without disclosing case-specific details. This suggests that, although some creativity may be required, it may be possible to meet survivors' needs within the constraints of institutional systems. Similarly, although the concept of involving athletes in communication processes is not explicitly explored in the literature, it has been suggested that reaching out to crisis-affected individuals is the best way to assess their needs, ideally in the early stages of a crisis management process (Jong & Brataas, 2021). I suggest that checking in with survivors of IV can support their well-being while also serving as an indicator of perceived responsibility. Further, it could help raise awareness of unknown reputational threats, such as dissatisfaction among athletes, speculation, rumours, and unresolved issues, thus providing an opportunity to get ahead of such narratives. Finally, the desire for transparency, especially regarding factors that impact internal interest-holders (i.e., survivors, other athletes, and staff), aligns with what Coombs suggests as part of the ethical base response, which is intended to be the first step in a crisis response strategy (Coombs et al., 2021). However, when determining the appropriate level of public transparency, athletes' well-being needs to be carefully considered, as both insufficient communication and oversharing can be harmful. For this reason, consulting the individuals directly involved in a case, when possible, is crucial. Although transparency in crisis communications is supported in existing literature, prioritizing survivors' needs in

communicative decision-making represents a novel contribution. I do not suggest a one-size-fits-all approach; rather, crisis communicators should carefully consider the needs of crisis-affected athletes when developing their strategies.

Taken together, the recommendations outlined in this thesis and their alignment with existing literature suggest that organizational reputation and athlete well-being can be used in concert to guide and evaluate crisis communication strategies in cases of IV in sport. The findings from both papers underscore the importance and feasibility of prioritizing athlete well-being when developing communication strategies for organizations following cases of IV in sport.

Survivor Lived Experience in Communication Literature

Lived experience appears to be an underutilized data source in crisis communication literature. To date, crisis communication and media literature has included few studies examining the perspectives of crisis-affected individuals, including those affected by violent events (McLellan, 1999) and natural disasters (Smith et al., 2012); however, no studies have examined the perspectives of individuals affected by sport-related crises. In sport crises, fan and public perspectives have been examined by analyzing social media posts (e.g., Brown et al., 2015; Frederick et al., 2021; Iachizzi, 2025). While fans can constitute a crisis-affected group, and IV survivors may be among those whose comments are included in such analyses, no study has specifically examined IV survivors' perspectives on their organizations' responses. Throughout this thesis, I demonstrated that organizational communication can harm survivors of IV. A key step in avoiding this harm is first to understand it, and doing so requires engaging with those who have directly experienced it. For this reason, lived experience-focused research is essential. This approach is relevant across crisis research contexts; if athletes affected by IV are influenced by

the way an organization communicates, I suspect that victims of other crises (e.g., workplace harassment and medical malpractice) would have similar responses. Gathering lived experience as data in the wake of a crisis, therefore, offers a clear means of improving crisis communication practices moving forward.

Communications as Part of the Unsafe Sport Experience

In these studies, we considered the communications process as part of a larger IV experience. By taking this approach, we gained an understanding of the extent to which athletes' experiences of IV intersect with their experiences of organizational communication. When paired with CFT, this exploration also helped illuminate how power, oppression, and gender can carry over from abusive environments and shape experiences of organizational communication. In this study, I demonstrated the harm that organizational communication can cause and, consequently, argued that safeguarding policies in sport should be extended to encompass the communication process. When IV occurs in sport, every effort should be made to avoid re-traumatizing survivors, and a TIA to the communication process is one way to help ensure this.

TIAs in Communications-Focused Research

While using a TIA in IV-related literature is increasingly common, doing so in communications remains novel. Using a TIA facilitated the collection of rich data, with participants being open, vulnerable, and candid during interviews. This allowed me to gain a nuanced understanding of their experiences of organizational communications. For example, most participants provided considerable depth when describing their experience of IV in the first portion of the interview. Although this was not directly related to my research question, it helped me develop a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and how their experiences with IV shaped their communication needs. Additionally, I believe that talking through experiences of

IV helped participants reflect on their communication experiences in greater depth. As this reflection occurred in real time during interviews, I was able to capture much of it in a relatively unfiltered form. These outcomes were highly valuable to the research, as they facilitated the collection of candid accounts and, in turn, the authentic representation of participants' experiences.

Furthermore, encouraging participants to share aspects of their experiences they felt were most important and taking steps to ensure they felt comfortable doing so were beneficial to the research. Early on, some participants needed reassurance that they could discuss whatever aspects of their experiences they considered most important. As they opened up, they shared insights that were not initially anticipated, such as challenging experiences with the media. These accounts yielded rich findings that, when considered together, reflect a comprehensive communications experience that may resonate with many athletes. This experience highlighted how TIAs can be applied to both sport and communications research, and further supports previous claims that their use can enhance the quality (Crosby et al., 2023) and richness (Smith et al., 2023) of the data collected.

Towards More Supportive Communications

In addition to the theoretical and methodological contributions outlined thus far, this work has important practical contributions. Overall, while the papers in this thesis were written for academic journals, this study was developed with crisis communicators and sport administrators in mind. As outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, I worked in sport marketing and communications for several years before pursuing this master's degree. During that period of my career, I observed that while I, a former athlete and survivor of IV in sport, felt able to anticipate some (though not all) of how communications might impact athletes, this same

awareness was not consistently evident among other communicators, administrators, and members of management. For this reason, the purpose of the second chapter of this thesis was to develop a paper to help communicators understand the potential impact and risks of their communication efforts. While I do not suggest that the experiences portrayed are universal, they highlight a meaningful range of experiences among athletes who have experienced IV. Accordingly, practitioners who engage with this work can draw on the insights generated from this analysis and apply them in practice. In particular, survivors of IV may be especially vulnerable to feeling unheard, and vague communication can reinforce this experience. It is also important to recognize that athletes awaiting organizational responses are both hopeful and vulnerable, and that they require care.

In addition, the third chapter of this thesis was written largely for crisis communicators. I developed a series of recommendations, all intended for consideration by crisis communicators. In the short story featuring a communicator, I showcased what a positive communications experience could look like. This was done first by outlining characteristics, such as concern and empathy, that the athletes sought in the people with whom they interacted. I also demonstrated specific actions that can be taken to support athletes' needs, as well as the potential magnitude of their impact.

I hope that these two papers, this broader thesis, and future survivor-focused sport crisis communications work can support crisis communicators and sport administrators as they navigate the challenging task of communicating on behalf of organizations following cases of IV. This type of communication is unlikely to be easy, and additional tools are needed to help support those responsible for managing it. This thesis aims, in part, to meet that need. The work presented here contributes to the theoretical, methodological, and practical advancement of IV-

related crisis communications; however, it is not without limitations, which are discussed in the following section.

Limitations

A number of limitations are considered in the following section. First, the participant sample was relatively homogeneous. All participants identified as English-speaking women, and most were white. While these studies allowed us to understand the experiences of this demographic well, it would be beneficial to explore the experiences of individuals with different gender identities, ethnicities, and racial backgrounds, as well as individuals with disabilities. Understanding how intersecting elements of identity contribute to these experiences would enable the development of recommendations better tailored to the unique needs and realities of a broader group of athletes. In particular, it would be important to explore the experiences of groups that are often excluded from sport. It is recommended that future research implement targeted recruitment efforts to achieve a representative sample.

Additionally, while gathering the perspectives of athletes who experienced IV was an important first step to this research, other lived experiences would also be valuable to consider in ongoing work. IV in sport affects not only athletes; the perspectives of coaches, staff, officials, and administrators who have experienced it were not included in this study and warrant further exploration in future work. This expanded exploration would allow for a deepened understanding of existing practices and impacts, and the development of improved approaches that meet the needs of all groups likely to be affected by crisis communications.

Lastly, while I compared the considerations developed in this study with recommendations in the literature, the practical challenges that may affect their implementation were not fully examined. For example, legal requirements faced by organizations, including

those related to confidentiality, respondent rights, or termination laws, could make it difficult to implement much of what I have suggested. Similarly, human resources policies may limit information sharing, and in some cases, communicators may not have access to all of the information athletes want to know or share. These represent some of the many challenges crisis communicators and sport administrators face when developing crisis communication strategies following IV cases. These requirements and barriers differ across sport contexts (e.g., professional sport, national sport organizations, grassroots sports); therefore, it was not possible to explore these barriers in the present work. A more detailed understanding of these challenges would allow for an improved set of recommendations. The elements discussed in this section were beyond the scope of this study; however, these gaps indicate potential directions for future work that, considered alongside this project, can contribute to meaningful improvements to communication processes and experiences.

Considerations for Future Research

Throughout these studies, several avenues for future research were identified. First, in response to the limitations identified above, it would be advantageous to conduct studies to gather the perspectives of a more diverse sample of sport participants. Similarly, an intersectional lens could provide a more nuanced understanding of how intersecting elements of our identities shape our perspectives and experiences of organizational communication. Studies that gather other interest-holders' perspectives on crisis communications in sport would also help ensure that future recommendations or frameworks are both representative of IV survivors and applicable to real-life IV cases.

Further, in this thesis, I argue that the communication process should be considered part of the IV complaint process, meaning that policies and measures to prevent re-traumatization

should be developed to support its execution. Additionally, individuals that could be affected by communications should be offered various types of support. In this study, I have shown that communications following an IV case can harm survivors. There is potential here to broaden and strengthen our response to IV cases and our support of survivors of IV by gaining a more long-term, holistic understanding of their experiences following IV. To do this, scholars could explore the long-term effects of IV beyond what has been examined (e.g., mental health) by gathering the perspectives of athletes many years out from their experiences with IV. This could help identify other sources of harm that might require trauma-informed approaches.

From a methodological perspective, several approaches could strengthen this type of research. First, co-production would be a great way to ensure that the principles of TIA are woven throughout the entire study (Isobel, 2021). This approach would also enable better collaboration between survivors of IV and the research team by disrupting power imbalances (Isobel, 2021). Co-production helps ensure that the wants and needs of affected groups are considered in research projects and that the research can be translated into action (Smith et al., 2023). Engaging in co-production is known to facilitate the development of high-quality research for many reasons, including generating rich knowledge of the particulars of issues, better research questions and processes, novel data, and the development of effective interventions (Smith et al., 2023). In crisis communication research related to IV in sport, engaging with community collaborators with lived experience of IV could enhance the applicability of research, ensure high-quality data, and guarantee that community group desires are met. Working with crisis communicators and sport administrators could play a significant role in easing some of the knowledge mobilization challenges outlined in this thesis. Additionally, arts-based methods are another approach that would be worthwhile to apply to a research project of this nature, as they

allow for the exploration of both personal and socio-cultural elements and the representation of complex moments and taboo topics (McMahon & McGannon, 2024). When participants engage with arts-based methods (e.g., poetry, digital mixed media, drawing), this allows the researcher and readers to deepen their understanding by gaining a glimpse into their lived experience (McMahon & McGannon, 2024). Arts-based methods involve the removal of constraints imposed by linear storytelling and allow survivors to represent their stories in a way that feels authentic to them (McMahon et al., 2024). Overall, arts-based research methods may allow for improved participant experience (McMahon et al., 2024), and collaborative approaches may result in improved research quality, as research teams would be able to gather more authentic accounts from participants, and the development of projects that truly meet the needs and wants of affected individuals (Smith et al., 2023).

Through this research, I identified a significant gap between what is recommended by researchers in the crisis communication literature and what occurs in practice. Exploring the reasons for this gap represents an important direction for future research. A significant knowledge translation gap may limit practitioners' access to academic insights that could inform their work. Conversely, it is also possible that what is suggested in theory is not feasible or applicable in practice. Identifying the cause of this discrepancy is a critical first step, which I suggest can be achieved by engaging crisis communicators, sport administrators, and other individuals involved in sport crisis response efforts. One approach would be to collect these perspectives through interviews and focus groups. Another would be to conduct ethnographic research in which a researcher or research team is involved in a crisis management process; this approach could encourage the collection of authentic and unfiltered data. I am hopeful that the work done as part of this research project, as well as the future work of sport and communication

researchers, will help us move towards communications processes that are safer, more supportive, and kinder to survivors of IV in sport.

Closing Thoughts

In this thesis project, I examined the impact of organizational communications on athletes who experienced IV in sport. Through this exploration, I have shown that organizational communication can harm IV survivors when not guided by trauma-informed, survivor-centred practices. I have also provided recommendations for crisis communicators that, based on the experiences of this study's participants, could help develop crisis responses that limit potential re-traumatization of athlete-survivors. To decrease the likelihood of communications being a source of trauma for crisis-affected individuals, survivor involvement is essential, as is prioritizing athlete well-being in communications campaigns and equipping crisis communicators with the knowledge required to develop trauma-informed approaches. This research project was deeply personal to me, and I had the opportunity to grow and challenge myself considerably through its execution. I am proud of the work produced, I am eternally grateful to the participants who played a role in it, and I am as hopeful as ever that a world where crisis communications are supportive for survivors of IV is within reach.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Statement of Contributions

This project was designed by Priya Narine and Dr. Sommer Christie. Priya Narine completed data collection, data analysis, and writing, and both contributors took part in participant recruitment. Additionally, Sommer Christie supported all portions of this project by providing mentorship and guidance, as well as editing and proofreading of all sections of the thesis.

Appendix B: English Recruitment Text

Platform: Instagram

Target audience: Contacts and general public

Caption:

We are recruiting!

I am excited to share that I am currently recruiting participants for my master's research project that will explore the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced abuse in sport.

We are looking for current or former athletes who have experienced abuse in sport to tell us about how they were impacted by the way their organization communicated following the complaint. For the purpose of his project, abuse in sport includes patterns or an incident of mistreatment that caused or had the potential to cause harm to an athlete and includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse as well as neglect.

To participate in this study, individuals must (1) be current or former athletes, (2) have experienced IV during their time in sport, (3) have been affiliated with a team, club, or organization that received a complaint regarding interpersonal violence, and (4) be over the age of 18.

Participation will include:

- A short phone call during which we will discuss the project details and go over any questions you may have. This call is an opportunity for you to get the information you need to decide if you would like to participate, and for me to determine if there is anything I can do to make your participation more comfortable.
- Participating in an interview where you will be asked to tell your story. The topics discussed, and the ones we avoid will ultimately be up to you. Interviews will vary in duration but are likely to last between 60 and 120 minutes.

Data will be de-identified, and your identity will not be shared in the results. In recognition that experiencing abuse in sport, and discussing such an experience can be traumatic, this study has been designed using a trauma-informed approach with the goal of reducing any risk of re-traumatization. Please feel free to reach out if you would like more information about this!

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, please send me a private message or email me at [researcher email address]. To respect the privacy of potential participants, please avoid tagging others directly in the comments of this post.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for this research project.

Platform: Facebook

Target audience: Contacts and general public

Caption:

We are recruiting!

I am excited to share that I am currently recruiting participants for my master's research project that will explore the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced abuse in sport.

We are looking for current or former athletes who have experienced abuse in sport to tell us about how they were impacted by the way their organization communicated following the complaint. For the purpose of this project, abuse in sport includes patterns or an incident of mistreatment that caused or had the potential to cause harm to an athlete and includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse as well as neglect.

To participate in this study, individuals must (1) be current or former athletes, (2) have experienced IV during their time in sport, (3) have been affiliated with a team, club, or organization that received a complaint regarding interpersonal violence, and (4) be over the age of 18.

Participation will include:

- A short phone call during which we will discuss the project details and go over any questions you may have. This call is an opportunity for you to get the information you need to decide if you would like to participate, and for me to determine if there is anything I can do to make your participation more comfortable.
- Participating in an interview where you will be asked to tell your story. The topics discussed, and the ones we avoid will ultimately be up to you. Interviews will vary in duration but are likely to last between 60 and 120 minutes.

Data will be de-identified, and your identity will not be shared in the results. In recognition that experiencing maltreatment in sport, and discussing such an experience can be traumatic, this study has been designed using a trauma-informed approach with the goal of reducing any risk of re-traumatization. Please feel free to reach out if you would like more information about this!

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, please send me a private message or email me at [researcher email address]. To respect the privacy of potential participants, please avoid tagging others directly in the comments of this post.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for this research project.

Platform: LinkedIn

Target audience: Contacts and general public

Caption:

We are recruiting!

I am excited to share that I am currently recruiting participants for my master's research project that will explore the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced abuse in sport.

We are looking for current or former athletes who have experienced abuse in sport to tell us about how they were impacted by the way their organization communicated following the complaint. For the purpose of this project, abuse in sport includes patterns or an incident of mistreatment that caused or had the potential to cause harm to an athlete and includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse as well as neglect.

To participate in this study, individuals must (1) be current or former athletes, (2) have experienced IV during their time in sport, (3) have been affiliated with a team, club, or organization that received a complaint regarding interpersonal violence, and (4) be over the age of 18.

Participation will include:

- A short phone call during which we will discuss the project details and go over any questions you may have. This call is an opportunity for you to get the information you need to decide if you would like to participate, and for me to determine if there is anything I can do to make your participation more comfortable.
- Participating in an interview where you will be asked to tell your story. The topics discussed, and the ones we avoid will ultimately be up to you. Interviews will vary in duration but are likely to last between 60 and 120 minutes.

Data will be de-identified, and your identity will not be shared in the results. In recognition that experiencing abuse in sport, and discussing such an experience can be traumatic, this study has been designed using a trauma-informed approach with the goal of reducing any risk of re-traumatization. Please feel free to reach out if you would like more information about this!

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, please send me a private message or email me at [researcher email address]. To respect the privacy of potential participants, please avoid tagging others directly in the comments of this post.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for this research project.

Platform: Email

Target audience: Individual known to research team

Message:

Hello [name],

I would like to invite you to participate in my master's research project that will explore the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced abuse in sport.

We are looking for current or former athletes who have experienced abuse in sport to tell us about how they were impacted by the way their organization communicated following the complaint. For the purpose of his project, abuse in sport includes patterns or an incident of mistreatment that caused or had the potential to cause harm to an athlete and includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse as well as neglect.

To participate in this study, individuals must (1) be current or former athletes, (2) have experienced IV during their time in sport, (3) have been affiliated with a team, club, or organization that received a complaint regarding interpersonal violence, and (4) be over the age of 18.

Participation will include:

- A short phone call during which we will discuss the project details and go over any questions you may have. This call is an opportunity for you to get the information you need to decide if you would like to participate, and for me to determine if there is anything I can do to make your participation more comfortable.
- Participating in an interview where you will be asked to tell your story. The topics discussed, and the ones we avoid will ultimately be up to you. Interviews will vary in duration but are likely to last between 60 and 120 minutes.

Data will be de-identified, and your identity will not be shared in the results. In recognition that experiencing abuse in sport, and discussing such an experience can be traumatic, this study has been designed using a trauma-informed approach with the goal of reducing any risk of re-traumatization. Please feel free to reach out if you would like more information about this!

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, please let me know!

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for this research project.

Platform: Email

Target audience: NSOs and other sport organizations

Message:

Hello [name],

My name is Priya Narine and I am currently recruiting participants to take part in my master's research project at the University of Ottawa under the supervision of Dr. Sommer Christie. In this project, we will explore the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced maltreatment in sport. I'm reaching out to ask if you would be willing to share the information for this study with the athletes who are part of your organization.

We are looking for current or former athletes who have experienced maltreatment in sport to tell us about how they were impacted by the way their organization communicated following the complaint.

Participants do not have to have experienced maltreatment during their time at [organization name], nor do they have to share organization names or details of the abuse with us if they do not want to. All identifiable information (e.g., the names of individuals involved, organization name) will be removed from the results. Our intention is not to place blame on specific organizations or communicators, but rather to shed light on the impact communication-based responses can have on athletes. Our hope is that this information better equips communications professionals to make trauma-informed decisions.

Below is a sample email that can be shared with athletes in your organization. A summary of the project is included, and I've also attached materials that can be forwarded to athletes.

Sample recruitment email text:

We're reaching out to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a master's research project focused on the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced maltreatment in sport.

The study is currently recruiting current or former athletes who have experienced maltreatment and are willing to share how they were affected by the way their organization communicated following the complaint. For the purpose of this project, abuse in sport includes patterns or an incident of mistreatment that caused or had the potential to cause harm to an athlete and includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse as well as neglect.

To participate in this study, individuals must (1) be current or former athletes, (2) have experienced IV during their time in sport, (3) have been affiliated with a team, club, or organization that received a complaint regarding interpersonal violence, and (4) be over the age of 18.

If this applies to you or someone you know, more details can be found in the attached materials.

Participation in the study will include:

- A short phone call during which we will discuss the project details and go over any questions you may have. This call is an opportunity for you to get the information you need to decide if you would like to move forward with participating in the study and for me to determine if there is anything to make your participation more comfortable.
- Participating in an interview where you will be asked to tell your story. The topics discussed, and the ones we avoid will ultimately be up to you. Interviews will vary in duration but are likely to last between 60 and 120 minutes.

Data will be de-identified, and your identity will not be shared in the results. In recognition that experiencing maltreatment in sport, and discussing such an experience can be traumatic, this study has been designed using a trauma-informed approach with the goal of reducing any risk of re-traumatization. Please feel free to reach out if you would like more information about this!

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, please reach out to Priya Narine at [researcher email address]

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for this research project.

Appendix C: French Recruitment Text

Platform: Instagram

Target audience: Contacts and general public

Caption:

Nous recrutons!

Je suis ravie de vous annoncer que je recrute actuellement des participant(e)s pour mon projet de recherche de maîtrise, qui vise à explorer l'impact des communications organisationnelles sur les athlètes ayant vécu des situations d'abus dans le sport.

Nous cherchons des athlètes actuel(le)s ou retraité(e)s ayant vécu des situations d'abus dans le sport, afin de mieux comprendre comment la manière dont leur organisation a communiqué après une plainte a eu un impact sur l'athlète. Dans le contexte de ce projet, l'abus dans le sport comprend des comportements répétés ou un incident de maltraitance ayant causé ou pouvant causer du tort à un(e) athlète, et inclut la maltraitance physique, sexuelle et psychologique ainsi que la négligence.

Pour participer vous devez (1) présentement être un(e) athlète ou être un(e) athlète retraité(e), (2) avoir vécu de l'abus pendant votre parcours sportif, (3) avoir été affilié(e) à une équipe, club ou organisation ayant reçu une plainte d'abus et (4) être âgé(e) de plus de 18 ans.

La participation comprend :

- Un court appel téléphonique pendant lequel nous discuterons des détails du projet et je répondrai à toutes vos questions. Cet appel est une occasion pour vous d'obtenir les informations nécessaires afin de décider si vous souhaitez participer à l'étude, et pour moi de voir s'il y a quelque chose que je peux faire pour rendre votre participation plus confortable.
- Une entrevue durant laquelle vous serez invité(e) à raconter votre histoire. Les sujets abordés et ceux que nous éviterons seront déterminés par vous. La durée des entrevues variera, mais elles devraient durer entre 60 et 120 minutes.

Les données recueillies seront anonymisées, et votre identité ne sera pas dévoilée dans les résultats. Reconnaissant que vivre et discuter au sujet de l'abus peut être traumatisant, cette étude a été conçue selon une approche tenant compte des traumatismes, dans le but de réduire tout risque de retraumatisation. N'hésitez pas à me contacter si vous souhaitez plus d'informations à ce sujet!

Si vous souhaitez participer à cette étude ou si vous avez des questions, veuillez m'envoyer un message privé ou un courriel à [adresse courriel de la chercheuse]. Afin de respecter la vie privée des participant(e)s potentiel(le)s, veuillez éviter d'identifier directement d'autres personnes dans les commentaires de cette publication.

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique de ce projet de recherche.

Nous recrutons!

Je suis ravie de vous annoncer que je recrute actuellement des participant(e)s pour mon projet de recherche de maîtrise, qui vise à explorer l'impact des communications organisationnelles sur les athlètes ayant vécu des situations d'abus dans le sport.

Nous cherchons des athlètes actuel(le)s ou retraité(e)s ayant vécu des situations d'abus dans le sport, afin de mieux comprendre comment la manière dont leur organisation a communiqué après une plainte a eu un impact sur l'athlète. Dans le contexte de ce projet, l'abus dans le sport comprend des comportements répétés ou un incident de maltraitance ayant causé ou pouvant causer du tort à un(e) athlète, et inclut la maltraitance physique, sexuelle et psychologique ainsi que la négligence.

Pour participer vous devez (1) présentement être un(e) athlète ou être un(e) athlète retraité(e), (2) avoir vécu de l'abus pendant votre parcours sportif, (3) avoir été affilié(e) à une équipe, club ou organisation ayant reçu une plainte d'abus et (4) être âgé(e) de plus de 18 ans.

La participation comprend :

- Un court appel téléphonique pendant lequel nous discuterons des détails du projet et je répondrai à toutes vos questions. Cet appel est une occasion pour vous d'obtenir les informations nécessaires afin de décider si vous souhaitez participer à l'étude, et pour moi de voir s'il y a quelque chose que je peux faire pour rendre votre participation plus confortable.
- Une entrevue durant laquelle vous serez invité(e) à raconter votre histoire. Les sujets abordés et ceux que nous éviterons seront déterminés par vous. La durée des entrevues variera, mais elles devraient durer entre 60 et 120 minutes.

Les données recueillies seront anonymisées, et votre identité ne sera pas dévoilée dans les résultats. Reconnaissant que vivre et discuter au sujet de l'abus peut être traumatisant, cette étude a été conçue selon une approche tenant compte des traumatismes, dans le but de réduire tout risque de retraumatisation. N'hésitez pas à me contacter si vous souhaitez plus d'informations à ce sujet!

Si vous souhaitez participer à cette étude ou si vous avez des questions, veuillez m'envoyer un message privé ou un courriel à [adresse courriel de la chercheuse]. Afin de respecter la vie privée des participant(e)s potentiel(le)s, veuillez éviter d'identifier directement d'autres personnes dans les commentaires de cette publication.

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique de ce projet de recherche.

Platform: LinkedIn

Target audience: Contacts and general public

Caption:

Nous recrutons!

Je suis ravie de vous annoncer que je recrute actuellement des participant(e)s pour mon projet de recherche de maîtrise, qui vise à explorer l'impact des communications organisationnelles sur les athlètes ayant vécu des situations d'abus dans le sport.

Nous cherchons des athlètes actuel(le)s ou retraité(e)s ayant vécu des situations d'abus dans le sport, afin de mieux comprendre comment la manière dont leur organisation a communiqué après une plainte a eu un impact sur l'athlète. Dans le contexte de ce projet, l'abus dans le sport comprend des comportements répétés ou un incident de maltraitance ayant causé ou pouvant causer du tort à un(e) athlète, et inclut la maltraitance physique, sexuelle et psychologique ainsi que la négligence.

Pour participer vous devez (1) présentement être un(e) athlète ou être un(e) athlète retraité(e), (2) avoir vécu de l'abus pendant votre parcours sportif, (3) avoir été affilié(e) à une équipe, club ou organisation ayant reçu une plainte d'abus et (4) être âgé(e) de plus de 18 ans.

La participation comprend :

- Un court appel téléphonique pendant lequel nous discuterons des détails du projet et je répondrai à toutes vos questions. Cet appel est une occasion pour vous d'obtenir les informations nécessaires afin de décider si vous souhaitez participer à l'étude, et pour moi de voir s'il y a quelque chose que je peux faire pour rendre votre participation plus confortable.
- Une entrevue durant laquelle vous serez invité(e) à raconter votre histoire. Les sujets abordés et ceux que nous éviterons seront déterminés par vous. La durée des entrevues variera, mais elles devraient durer entre 60 et 120 minutes.

Les données recueillies seront anonymisées, et votre identité ne sera pas dévoilée dans les résultats. Reconnaissant que vivre et discuter au sujet de l'abus peut être traumatisant, cette étude a été conçue selon une approche tenant compte des traumatismes, dans le but de réduire tout risque de retraumatisation. N'hésitez pas à me contacter si vous souhaitez plus d'informations à ce sujet!

Si vous souhaitez participer à cette étude ou si vous avez des questions, veuillez m'envoyer un message privé ou un courriel à [adresse courriel de la chercheuse]. Afin de respecter la vie privée des participant(e)s potentiel(le)s, veuillez éviter d'identifier directement d'autres personnes dans les commentaires de cette publication.

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique de ce projet de recherche.

Platform: Email

Target audience: Individual known to research team

Message:

Bonjour [nom],

J'aimerais vous inviter à participer à mon projet de recherche de maîtrise, qui vise à explorer l'impact des communications organisationnelles sur les athlètes ayant vécu de l'abus dans le sport. Dans le contexte de ce projet, l'abus dans le sport comprend des comportements répétés ou un incident de maltraitance ayant causé ou pouvant causer du tort à un(e) athlète, et inclut la maltraitance physique, sexuelle et psychologique ainsi que la négligence.

Pour participer vous devez (1) présentement être un(e) athlète ou être un(e) athlète retraité(e), (2) avoir vécu de l'abus pendant votre parcours sportif, (3) avoir été affilié(e) à une équipe, club ou organisation ayant reçu une plainte d'abus et (4) être âgé(e) de plus de 18 ans.

Nous cherchons des athlètes actuel(le)s ou retraité(e)s ayant vécu des situations d'abus dans le sport, afin de mieux comprendre comment la manière dont leur organisation a communiqué après une plainte a eu un impact sur l'athlète.

La participation comprend :

- Un court appel téléphonique pendant lequel nous discuterons des détails du projet et je répondrai à toutes vos questions. Cet appel est une occasion pour vous d'obtenir les informations nécessaires afin de décider si vous souhaitez participer à l'étude, et pour moi de voir s'il y a quelque chose que je peux faire pour rendre votre participation plus confortable.
- Une entrevue durant laquelle vous serez invité(e) à raconter votre histoire. Les sujets abordés et ceux que nous éviterons seront déterminés par vous. La durée des entrevues variera, mais elles devraient durer entre 60 et 120 minutes.

Les données recueillies seront anonymisées, et votre identité ne sera pas dévoilée dans les résultats. Reconnaissant que vivre et discuter au sujet de l'abus peut être traumatisant, cette étude a été conçue selon une approche tenant compte des traumatismes, dans le but de réduire tout risque de retraumatisation. N'hésitez pas à me contacter si vous souhaitez plus d'informations à ce sujet!

Si vous souhaitez participer à cette étude ou si vous avez des questions, laissez-moi savoir!

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique de ce projet de recherche.

Platform: Email

Target audience: NSOs and other sport organizations

Message:

Bonjour [Nom],

Je m'appelle Priya Narine et je recrute actuellement des participant(e)s pour mon projet de recherche de maîtrise à l'Université d'Ottawa. Ce projet se fait sous la supervision de la Dre Sommer Christie et vise à explorer l'impact des communications organisationnelles sur les athlètes ayant vécu des situations de maltraitance dans le sport. Je me permets de vous contacter pour vous demander si vous seriez disposé(e) à partager l'information concernant cette étude avec les athlètes de votre organisation.

Nous cherchons des athlètes actuel(le)s ou retraité(e)s ayant vécu de la maltraitance dans le sport, afin de mieux comprendre comment la manière dont leur organisation a communiqué après une plainte les a affecté(e)s.

Les participant(e)s n'ont pas besoin d'avoir vécu cette maltraitance au sein de [nom de l'organisation], et il n'est pas nécessaire qu'ils/elles partagent le nom de l'organisation ni les détails de la maltraitance s'ils/elles ne le souhaitent pas. Toute information permettant d'identifier des personnes ou des organisations (par exemple, noms de personnes ou d'organisations) sera retirée des résultats. L'objectif n'est pas de blâmer des organisations ou des communicateur(ice)s en particulier, mais plutôt de mettre en lumière l'impact que les réponses communicationnelles peuvent avoir sur les athlètes. Nous espérons que ces résultats permettront aux professionnel(le)s des communications de prendre des décisions mieux adaptées, en tenant compte des traumatismes.

Vous trouverez ci-dessous un exemple de message courriel que vous pouvez transmettre aux athlètes de votre organisation. Un résumé du projet y est inclus, et j'ai également joint des documents que vous pouvez leur faire suivre.

Exemple de texte pour un courriel de recrutement :

Nous vous écrivons pour vous informer d'une occasion de participer à un projet de recherche de maîtrise portant sur l'impact des communications organisationnelles sur les athlètes ayant vécu de l'abus dans le sport.

L'étude recrute actuellement des athlètes actuel(le)s ou retraité(e)s ayant vécu de l'abus dans le sport qui sont disposé(e)s à partager comment ils/elles ont été affecté(e)s par la manière dont leur organisation a communiqué après une plainte. Dans le contexte de ce projet, l'abus dans le sport comprend des comportements répétés ou un incident de maltraitance ayant causé ou pouvant causer du tort à un(e) athlète, et inclut la maltraitance physique, sexuelle et psychologique ainsi que la négligence.

Pour participer vous devez (1) présentement être un(e) athlète ou être un(e) athlète retraité(e), (2) avoir vécu de l'abus pendant votre parcours sportif, (3) avoir été affilié(e) à une équipe, club ou organisation ayant reçu une plainte d'abus et (4) être âgé(e) de plus de 18 ans.

Si vous êtes intéressé ou connaissez quelqu'un qui pourrait l'être, vous trouverez plus de détails dans les documents ci-joints.

La participation comprend :

- Un court appel téléphonique pendant lequel nous discuterons des détails du projet et je répondrai à toutes vos questions. Cet appel est une occasion pour vous d'obtenir les informations nécessaires afin de décider si vous souhaitez participer à l'étude, et pour moi de voir s'il y a quelque chose que je peux faire pour rendre votre participation plus confortable.
- Une entrevue durant laquelle vous serez invité(e) à raconter votre histoire. Les sujets abordés et ceux que nous éviterons seront déterminés par vous. La durée des entrevues variera, mais elles devraient durer entre 60 et 120 minutes.

Les données recueillies seront anonymisées, et votre identité ne sera pas dévoilée dans les résultats. Reconnaissant que vivre et discuter au sujet de l'abus peut être traumatisant, cette étude a été conçue selon une approche tenant compte des traumatismes, dans le but de réduire tout risque de retraumatisation. N'hésitez pas à me contacter si vous souhaitez plus d'informations à ce sujet!

Si vous souhaitez participer à cette étude ou si vous avez des questions, veuillez communiquer avec Priya Narine par courriel à [adresse courriel de la chercheuse].

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique de ce projet de recherche.

Appendix D: Recruitment Visuals

PARTICIPANTS MUST



- be current or former athletes,
- have experienced abuse during their time in sport,
- have been affiliated with a team, club, or organization that received a complaint regarding maltreatment, and
- be over the age of 18.

Contact Priya Narine if you are interested in participating or would like to find out more!

Interested?

WE ARE

RESEARCH
PARTICIPANTS



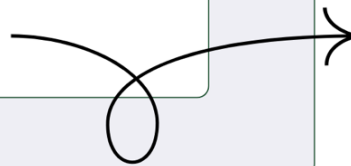
RECRUITING



EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF
ORGANIZATIONAL
COMMUNICATIONS ON
ATHLETES WHO HAVE
EXPERIENCED
MALTREATMENT(ABUSE) IN
SPORT



uOttawa



WE ARE RECRUITING

RESEARCH
PARTICIPANTS



EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL
COMMUNICATIONS ON ATHLETES WHO HAVE
EXPERIENCED MALTREATMENT (ABUSE) IN SPORT



Interested?

Contact Priya Narine if you are
interested in participating or would like
to find out more!



PARTICIPANTS MUST

- be current or former athletes,
- have experienced abuse during their time in sport,
- have been affiliated with a team, club, or organization that received a complaint regarding maltreatment, and
- be over the age of 18.



POUR PARTICIPER VOUS DEVEZ

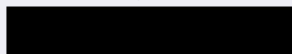


- présentement être un(e) athlète ou être un(e) athlète retraité(e),
- avoir vécu de l'abus pendant votre parcours sportif,
- avoir été affilié(e) à une équipe, club ou organisation ayant reçu une plainte d'abus et
- être âgé(e) de plus de 18 ans.



Intéressé(e)?

Si vous souhaitez participer à cette étude ou si vous avez des questions, veuillez contacter Priya Narine!



NOUS

PARTICIPANT(E)S DE
RECHERCHE



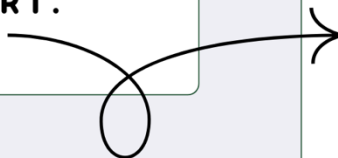
RECRUTONS



**EXPLORER L'IMPACT DES
COMMUNICATIONS
ORGANISATIONNELLES SUR
LES ATHLÈTES AYANT VÉCU
DE LA VIOLENCE
INTERPERSONNELLE (ABUS)
DANS LE SPORT.**



uOttawa



NOUS RECRUTONS

PARTICIPANT(E)S
DE RECHERCHE



EXPLORER L'IMPACT DES COMMUNICATIONS
ORGANISATIONNELLES SUR LES ATHLÈTES AYANT
VÉCU DE LA VIOLENCE INTERPERSONNELLE
(ABUS) DANS LE SPORT.



Intéressé?

Si vous souhaitez participer à cette étude
ou si vous avez des questions, veuillez
contacter Priya Narine!

POUR PARTICIPER VOUS DEVEZ

- être un(e) athlète actuel(le) ou ancien(ne),
- avoir vécu de l'abus pendant votre parcours sportif,
- avoir été affilié(e)s à une équipe, club, ou organisation ayant reçu une plainte d'abus, et
- être âgé-e-s de plus de 18 ans.



Appendix E: Pre-Participation Call Guide

Upon expressing interest in participating in this study, individuals will be invited to participate in a brief pre-participation call, which can be conducted over the phone or via video call. They will also receive an informed consent form to review before the call and a demographic questionnaire to complete once they have signed the informed consent form and before participating in the interview. The overall aim for this call is to set the tone of the study by being open, warm, and non-judgmental. The plan for the pre-participation call is outlined below.

Opening and Introduction

Hello [participant name], my name is Priya, and my pronouns are she/her. Would you be comfortable sharing your pronouns with me? Thank you again for your interest in participating in this study. Can you tell me a bit about yourself? I am now going to tell you more about myself and this study, and then I have a few questions for you. Please feel free to interject at any point to ask questions or share your thoughts.

I competed in track and field at the national and U SPORTS levels until about 2018. During my time as an athlete, I had a psychologically abusive coach who sexually harassed many athletes. We experienced a lot of body shaming, mind games, and manipulation, and it took me a long time to understand everything that happened as well as to heal from it all. A series of complaints and investigations ensued regarding my coach, who was ultimately banned from coaching in Canada. Before the ban was in place, and even to this day, communications shared by a variety of organizations have made things more difficult for me and my teammates. I can provide more details about this if you'd like and offer some examples. Ultimately, I went on to work in sports marketing and communications, where I continued to witness the impacts of organizations' wide range of communication responses when addressing IV cases, some of which are positive, but many of which can be harmful. When I worked in communications, I

realized that communicators do not typically have the same perspective I have and therefore may not realize the impact of what they say may have on athletes. That realization ultimately gave rise to this project. I hope to capture and showcase the experience of athletes regarding how their organization communicated following an IV case. There are no right or wrong answers; we want to understand multiple perspectives.

Study Design

I also want to acknowledge that discussing this topic is not easy, so I appreciate your interest in participating. It was important to me that this study be built in a trauma-informed manner, meaning that we take as many steps as possible to make this process easier for you, the participant. This call is the first step in that process. I want to ensure that you fully understand the purpose of the study, as well as what the interview process will entail, so that there are no surprises. I also want you to ask questions, provide comments, and offer feedback, as we are open to adjusting this process if any part of it needs improvement.

Following this call, if you remain interested in participating, we will schedule an interview. The interview will be mostly unstructured. I will pose a broad question, and then the floor will be yours to share your experience. You will ultimately have the control to take the conversation where you would like to take it and to avoid any topics you do not want to discuss. The idea with this style of interview is that you, the interviewee, are in control. I will ask follow-up questions and request clarifications, but again, you get to choose how to tell your story, and you do not have to answer my questions if you are not comfortable doing so. Do you have any questions about me, the study purpose, or the interview approach?

I have a few questions for you now. If you would like to consider any of the answers and get back to me, or if you would like to skip any questions, that is okay.

- First, I would like to confirm your eligibility to participate in this study. To do so, I will ask you a few yes-or-no questions.
 - o Are you, or have you been, an athlete?
 - o Have you experienced IV in sport?
 - o Have you been affiliated with a club, team, or organization that received a complaint alleging IV?
 - o Are you over the age of 18?
- I sent you an informed consent form before this call. We will review it together shortly. Do you have any questions about that at this time? Are you comfortable with everything in the form? Once you do provide consent, you can withdraw it at any time by letting me know you would like to do so.
- Do you require any accommodations (i.e., wheelchair access, translation, etc.) now or during the interview to participate in this study?
- Would you prefer to do this interview online or in person? If the interview is in person, where would you feel most comfortable conducting it? I have access to rooms at the University of Ottawa, if that works for you.
- Would you like to bring someone with you for support and/or to participate in the interview alongside you?
- The interview will last as long as you feel comfortable. If the interview extends beyond 1.5 hours, I will check in with you to see whether you would like to continue or prefer to schedule a subsequent session. Does that sound ok to you?
- Are you comfortable with me as the interviewer?

- Is there anything that might make you feel more comfortable during the interview? Is there anything that might make this process less comfortable for you that I should be aware of?
- Would you like to see the interview guide before the interview?
- You will have the opportunity to review the manuscript before publication. Is that something that you are interested in doing?
- If we quote you directly in the results, is there a pseudonym you would like us to use for you?
- Would you like me to send you the final paper once it is written?
- Do you have any questions or feedback for me?

Conclusion

At the end of the call, I will confirm whether participants are still interested in participating in the study. If they are still interested in participating, I will ask them to return the informed consent form and demographic questionnaire via email and schedule the narrative interview session(s) while they are still on the call. At this time, I will proactively provide them with a list of support resources.

This plan is informed by the following publications: Crosby et al., 2023; Isobel, 2021; McMahon et al., 2023; SAMHSA, 2014; Papathomas et al., 2024.

Appendix F: English Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of the Study: Exploring the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced interpersonal violence (abuse) in sport.

Name of Principal Investigator: Priya Narine, MA student Affiliation: School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa Email address: [researcher email address] Telephone number: [researcher email phone number]	Name of Supervisor: Sommer Christie, PhD, CMPC Affiliation: School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa Email address: [supervisor email address] Telephone number: [supervisor phone number]
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This consent form is only one part of the informed consent process. It should provide you with a basic understanding of what the research is about and what your participation will entail. If you would like more details about something mentioned here or information not included here, please ask. Take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Invitation to Participate: I have been invited to participate in the research study, conducted by Priya Narine and Dr. Christie, which will be used as part of Priya's Master's of Arts thesis research. I have been asked to participate in this study as I am a current or former athlete, have experienced abuse during my time in sport, have been affiliated with a team, club, or organization that received a complaint regarding abuse, I am over the age of 18, and I am willing to discuss my experience of organizational communications following an abuse case.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to explore the impact of organizational communications on athletes who have experienced abuse in sport.

Participation: My participation will involve **taking part in a one to two-hour** interview, which I can complete by videoconference (e.g., Zoom), or in person at a location of my choosing. If the interview runs long or if I would like to take a break, I may choose to complete the interview over two or three sessions. During the interview(s), I will be invited to share my story, including how my organization communicated with me following an abuse complaint, and how these communications impacted me.

I understand that the interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy in capturing my responses. These recordings will be used solely for the purposes of this research and will be transcribed and securely stored. Only Priya Narine and Dr. Christie will have access to the recordings, and all

identifying information will be removed during the transcription process. Some online platforms (e.g., Zoom) automatically generate video recordings when calls are recorded. In such cases, all video files will be deleted immediately after the interview has been transcribed, and only de-identified transcripts and audio files will be retained. I may choose to stop recording at any time without consequence.

I will be given the opportunity to review the transcript(s) from my interview(s). A copy of the transcript(s) will be emailed to me in a password-protected document, and I will have two weeks to request changes by email or by telephone. At that time, I can request that the researcher remove, add, or modify any or all information that I feel is necessary. If I do not respond within two weeks, the researcher will send a follow-up email on the 14th day. If I do not respond, this will be taken as my agreement with having my words included in the study.

Risks: Participating in this study will require me to share personal information and discuss sensitive topics, which may evoke unpleasant emotions, such as distress, sadness, or anger. I have received assurance from the researchers that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. The following measures will be taken to minimize potential risks. During the interview, I will have the option to skip questions, take breaks, and end the interview at any time. I am encouraged to avoid any topics I do not want to discuss and can let the researcher know what these are ahead of or at any time during the interview. I will also be provided with a list of support services should I need support following the interview. If I experience distress during the session, the interviewer will remain with me until I feel ready to continue or to end the session. In the case of significant distress during the session, the researcher will stay with me until I receive the proper emergency support (e.g., 911 or hospital).

Benefits: My participation in this study will contribute to an enhanced understanding of how organizational communications impact athletes who have experienced interpersonal violence in sport. In certain cases, participating in research interviews can empower trauma survivors and contribute to their healing.

Confidentiality and Privacy: I have received assurance from the researchers that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential and that only Priya Narine and Dr. Christie will have access to data collected (i.e., personal information, audio recordings, transcripts, consent forms). I understand that the findings of this study may be presented at academic conferences, published in scholarly journals, and shared with sport organizations with all identifying information removed.

I understand that my identity will be protected in the following ways. If I am quoted directly in the results, a pseudonym will be used in place of my name. Organization names will also be modified in the final results.

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____

Reporting

Under specific circumstances legislated by law (i.e., Personal Health Information Protection Act, Mental Health Act, Child, Youth and Family Services Act), the researcher may be obligated to break confidentiality. Specific circumstances limiting the participant-held privilege of confidentiality are itemized below:

1. If a participant threatens or attempts to commit suicide or otherwise conducts themselves in a manner in which there is a substantial risk of incurring serious bodily harm.
2. If a participant threatens grave bodily harm or death to another person.
3. If the researcher has a reasonable suspicion that the participant or other named victim is the perpetrator, observer of, or actual victim of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect of children under the age of 18 years or the elderly.
4. If the researcher becomes aware of ongoing abuse of a child under the age of 18.

Conservation of Data: Only Priya Narine and Dr. Christie will have access to the data collected (i.e., personal information, audio recordings, transcripts, consent forms). All data will be stored safely in password-protected files, accessible only on their password-protected computers. All data will be de-identified, and a pseudonym will be assigned to my information. A list linking my information to the selected pseudonym will be kept in a password-protected file and will be deleted on the Principal Investigator's graduation date. All video files will be deleted immediately after the interview has been transcribed, and only de-identified transcripts and audio files will be retained. All remaining research data will be securely deleted after a period of 10 years.

Compensation: There is no cost to participate in this study, and I will not be financially compensated for participating.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate, and if I choose to participate, I may withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions without incurring any negative consequences. If I decide to withdraw, all data collected up to that point will be removed from the dataset and not used in the study. I understand that I will no longer be able to withdraw once results have been submitted for publication, as the findings will already have been shared, or once the Principal Investigator graduates, as all identifiers will be permanently destroyed and individual data cannot be traced.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or their supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity via email (ethics@uottawa.ca) or telephone (613-562-5800 ext. 5387).

It is recommended that I save a copy of this consent form for my records.

By signing my name below, I agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's name: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix G: French Consent Form

Formulaire de consentement

Titre de l'étude : Explorer l'impact des communications organisationnelles sur les athlètes ayant vécu de la violence interpersonnelle (abus) dans le sport.

Nom de la chercheuse principale: Priya Narine, étudiante à la maîtrise Affiliation : École des sciences de l'activité physique, Faculté des sciences de la santé, Université d'Ottawa Adresse courriel : [adresse courriel de la chercheuse] Numéro de téléphone : [numéro de téléphone de la chercheuse]	Nom de la superviseure : Sommer Christie, PhD, CMPC Affiliation : École des sciences de l'activité physique, Faculté des sciences de la santé, Université d'Ottawa Adresse courriel : [adresse courriel de la superviseure] Numéro de téléphone : [numéro de téléphone de la superviseure]
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Ce formulaire de consentement constitue une partie du processus de consentement éclairé. Il vise à vous fournir une compréhension de base de l'étude et de ce que votre participation implique. Si vous souhaitez obtenir plus de détails sur ce qui est mentionné ou des informations non incluses ici, n'hésitez pas à poser des questions. Prenez le temps de lire attentivement ce document et de comprendre toute information jointe.

Invitation à participer : J'ai été invité(e) à participer à une étude de recherche menée par Priya Narine et la Dre Christie, dans le cadre de la thèse de maîtrise en arts de Priya. J'ai été sollicité(e) pour participer à cette étude parce que je suis présentement un(e) athlète ou je suis un(e) athlète retraité(e), j'ai vécu de l'abus pendant ma participation dans le sport, j'ai été affilié(e) à une équipe, un club ou une organisation ayant reçu une plainte concernant de l'abus, j'ai plus de 18 ans, et je suis disposé(e) à parler de mon expérience concernant les communications organisationnelles après un cas d'abus dans le sport.

Objectif de l'étude : L'objectif de cette étude est d'examiner l'impact des communications organisationnelles sur les athlètes ayant vécu de l'abus dans le sport.

Participation : Ma participation consistera à prendre part à **une entrevue d'une durée de 1 à 2 heures**, que je pourrai réaliser par appel vidéo (p. ex. Zoom) ou en personne à l'endroit de mon

choix. Si l'entrevue est plus longue ou si je souhaite faire une pause, je pourrai la poursuivre sur deux ou trois séances. Pendant l'entrevue, je serai invité(e) à raconter mon histoire, notamment comment mon organisation a communiqué après une plainte d'abus, et comment ces communications m'ont affecté(e).

Je comprends que l'entrevue sera enregistrée pour garantir l'exactitude de la transcription. Ces enregistrements seront utilisés uniquement aux fins de cette recherche, puis transcrits et conservés de manière sécurisée. Seule Priya Narine et la Dre Christie y auront accès, et toutes les informations permettant de m'identifier seront retirées de la transcription. Certaines plateformes en ligne (p. ex., Zoom) génèrent automatiquement des enregistrements vidéo lorsque les appels sont enregistrés. Dans de tels cas, tous les fichiers vidéo seront supprimés immédiatement après la transcription de l'entrevue, et seules les transcriptions dépersonnalisées et les fichiers audio seront conservés. Je pourrai demander que l'enregistrement soit interrompu à tout moment sans conséquence.

J'aurai l'occasion de relire la ou les transcriptions de mes entrevues. Une copie de la transcription me sera envoyée par courriel dans un document protégé par mot de passe, et j'aurai deux semaines pour demander des modifications par courriel ou téléphone. Je pourrai demander à ce que certaines parties soient retirées, modifiées ou ajoutées. Si je ne réponds pas dans les deux semaines, une relance me sera envoyée au 14^e jour. Si je ne réponds pas à cette relance, mon silence sera considéré comme un accord à inclure mes propos dans l'étude.

Risques : Ma participation nécessitera de partager des informations personnelles et de discuter de sujets sensibles, ce qui peut susciter des émotions désagréables telles que la détresse, la tristesse ou la colère. Les chercheuses m'ont assuré que tout sera mis en œuvre pour minimiser ces risques. Les mesures suivantes seront prises : pendant l'entrevue, je pourrai sauter des questions, faire des pauses ou y mettre fin à tout moment. Je suis encouragé(e) à éviter les sujets que je ne souhaite pas aborder et je peux en informer la chercheuse à tout moment. Je recevrai également une liste de ressources d'aide après l'entrevue. En cas de détresse, l'intervieweuse restera avec moi jusqu'à ce que je sois prêt(e) à continuer ou à conclure la séance. En cas de détresse importante, la chercheuse restera avec moi jusqu'à ce que je reçoive l'aide d'urgence nécessaire (ex. 911 ou hôpital).

Avantages : Ma participation contribuera à une meilleure compréhension de l'impact des communications organisationnelles sur les athlètes ayant subi de la violence interpersonnelle dans le sport. Dans certains cas, participer à ce type d'étude peut permettre aux survivants de traumatisme de se sentir valorisés et contribuer à leur processus de guérison.

Confidentialité et vie privée : Les chercheuses m'ont assuré que les informations que je partagerai resteront strictement confidentielles et que seules Priya Narine et la Dre Christie auront accès aux données recueillies (c.-à-d. renseignements personnels, enregistrements audio, transcriptions, formulaires de consentement). Je comprends que les résultats de l'étude pourront être présentés lors de conférences scientifiques, publiés dans des revues spécialisées et communiqués à des organisations sportives, avec retrait de toute information permettant de m'identifier.

Je comprends que mon identité sera protégée comme suit : si je suis cité(e) dans les résultats, un pseudonyme sera utilisé à la place de mon nom. Les noms d'organisations seront également modifiés dans les résultats finaux.

Le pseudonyme que je choisis est : _____

Divulgation

Dans certaines situations prévues par la loi (par exemple, Loi sur la protection des renseignements personnels sur la santé, Loi sur la santé mentale, Loi sur les services à l'enfance, à la jeunesse et à la famille), la chercheuse pourrait être obligée de briser la confidentialité. Les situations suivantes peuvent entraîner une telle obligation :

1. Si une personne menace ou tente de se suicider ou se comporte de manière à risquer de se blesser gravement.
2. Si une personne menace de causer des blessures graves ou la mort à quelqu'un d'autre.
3. Si la chercheuse a des raisons de soupçonner qu'une personne a commis de l'abus ou est victime d'abus physique, émotionnel ou sexuel ou de négligence envers un(e) enfant de moins de 18 ans ou une personne âgée.
4. Si la chercheuse apprend l'existence d'abus en cours contre un(e) enfant de moins de 18 ans.

Conservation des données : Seules Priya Narine et la Dre Christie auront accès aux données recueillies (informations personnelles, enregistrements audio, transcriptions, formulaires de consentement). Toutes les données seront conservées en toute sécurité dans des fichiers protégés par mot de passe, accessibles uniquement sur leurs ordinateurs protégés par mot de passe. Toutes les données seront rendues non identifiables, et un pseudonyme sera attribué à mes informations. Une liste reliant mes informations au pseudonyme sélectionné sera conservée dans un fichier protégé par mot de passe et sera supprimée à la date d'obtention du diplôme de la chercheuse principale. Tous les fichiers vidéo seront supprimés immédiatement après la transcription de l'entrevue, et seules les transcriptions rendues non identifiables et les fichiers audio seront conservés. Toutes les autres données de recherche seront supprimées de manière sécurisée après une période de 10 ans.

Compensation : Il n'y a aucun coût pour participer à cette étude, et je ne recevrai pas de compensation financière pour ma participation.

Participation volontaire : Ma participation est entièrement volontaire. Je peux me retirer de l'étude à tout moment ou refuser de répondre à certaines questions, sans conséquence négative. Si je décide de me retirer, toutes les données recueillies jusqu'à ce moment seront supprimées de l'ensemble de données et ne seront pas utilisées dans l'étude. Je comprends que je ne pourrai plus me retirer une fois que les résultats auront été soumis pour publication, puisque les conclusions auront déjà été partagées, ou une fois que la chercheuse principale aura obtenu son diplôme, car tous les identifiants auront été définitivement détruits et les données individuelles ne pourront plus être retracées.

Si j'ai des questions concernant l'étude, je peux contacter la chercheuse ou sa superviseure. Pour toute question relative à l'éthique de cette recherche, je peux communiquer avec le Bureau d'éthique de la recherche de l'Université d'Ottawa par courriel (ethics@uottawa.ca) ou par téléphone (613-562-5800, poste 5387).

Il est recommandé que je conserve une copie de ce formulaire de consentement pour mes dossiers.

En signant mon nom ci-dessous, je consens à participer à cette étude.

Nom de la participante / Nom du participant : _____

Signature de la participante / Signature du participant : _____

Date: _____

Nom de la chercheuse :

Signature de la chercheuse : _____ Date: _____

Appendix H: Distress Management Protocols

The following protocols have been developed to ensure that appropriate support is provided to participants:

- All participants will be provided with a list of support resources prior to and following the interview.
- If a participant exhibits minor distress during the interview, the interviewer will acknowledge this verbally and will ask the participant if they would like to take a break from the interview.
- If they do choose to take a break, the interviewer and participant will reassess their emotional state before returning to the interview; they will also be given the option to stop the interview altogether.
- If the interviewer observes that the participant appears distressed but wishes to continue, they should consider shifting the interview to lighter topics between more challenging ones.
- If at any time the interview is stopped, the interviewer should check in with the interviewee and offer help connecting them to support.
- If the participant exhibits signs of severe or extreme distress, the interviewer should stop the interview and focus on supporting the interviewee.
- If the interviewer is concerned about the interviewee's well-being after the interview, they should offer to help the participant access immediate support.

This protocol was developed based on principles of the qualitative research distress protocol (Whitney & Evered, 2022) and TI research approaches (Isobel, 2021).

Appendix I: Self-Care Plan

The personal self-care action plan I have put in place includes the following steps:

1. I will maintain formal psychological support by working with a mental health practitioner I am familiar with throughout this research. I will set a pre-determined meeting frequency plan before data collection commences.
2. When it comes time to interview participants, I will set up what is referred to as a buddy system by Silverio and colleagues (2022) with my thesis supervisor, whereby I will send her a text message upon completion of interviews. If I indicate to her that the interview was distressing, we will set up a debrief session shortly after. Debrief sessions will also occur after non-distressing interviews, but can be incorporated into our weekly meeting schedule.
3. I will lean on my personal support system. Specifically, my husband has been a great support throughout my journey of processing my time in sport. Given his work as a Certified Mental Performance Consultant, he can provide needed support.
4. I will allow at least two days between data collection sessions, as recommended when interview topics are likely sensitive (Silverio et al., 2022). This will allow me to process difficult emotions and seek support between sessions.
5. I will maintain a regular exercise and sleep schedule throughout this process, as those aspects have always supported my overall well-being.
6. I will regularly journal throughout this process and will focus my reflections on ensuring that I respect and remain aware of my boundaries. This year, I have been writing and talking about my experiences with IV in sport more and more. Part of the reason I have been doing this is to help myself get a good idea of where my triggers and boundaries

might lie. Continuing to check in with myself and acknowledge shifts in boundaries or comfort levels will be important.

This plan is informed by the work of Smith (2024), Silverio and colleagues (2022), and Giles and colleagues' (2024).

Appendix J: Interview Guide

Opening

Hello [participant name], thank you again for agreeing to take the time to participate in this study. I appreciate it. I wanted to remind you that participation in this study is entirely up to you. If at any point you would like to withdraw from the study or stop the interview, please let me know. We can also take a break at any point, and if you would like to skip any questions, that is entirely ok. We scheduled a call of [number of minutes] for today, and during the pre-participation call, we agreed on [decision about splitting into multiple sessions]. Does that still sound okay to you?

When we last met, I introduced myself and described the study in detail. Would you like me to go over that again as a refresher? [Review research details as needed]. In terms of the questions we discussed, is there anything you would like to talk more about or change?

The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. We will be discussing some topics that might be difficult to discuss, so if at any point you want to take a break, stop, or need anything at all, please let me know. As discussed, the goal is for you to control this conversation and what we discuss. I will also share the list of support resources with you again once we are finished today, and if you have any questions about additional support, please let me know.

With your permission, I would like to record the session today. The recording will only be accessible to my supervisor and me. I am recording so I can listen to you actively rather than focus on writing down everything you say word for word. Do I have your permission to record? If at any point you would like me to stop recording, please let me know. Your name and personal information will not be included in the final paper.

Getting Started

Do you have any questions before we get going?

Are you okay with me starting the recording now?

Narration Phase

This study aims to explore athletes' experiences of organizational communications following incidents of IV in sport. As an athlete who has experienced IV in sport, please tell me about your overall experience, how your organization communicated, and how their response impacted you?

[Listen actively]

[Ask for clarification as needed]

Conversation phase

The content of this phase will vary. Follow-up questions can cover topics such as:

- Details about the organization's response (e.g., what, when, how, where, and asking to provide examples)
- How the organization's response made the athlete feel
- If the athlete feels that the organization's response impacted them directly in any way
- Were there any consequences (positive or negative) due to the organization's response (e.g., media stories, media reaching out for comment, public pressure/harassment/support, financial loss, loss of friendships, support outreach)
- Was there any impact on team dynamics, culture, or relationships
- Whether the organization's response helped or worsened their experience
- How they think the organization should have responded

Conclusion

That is all I have in terms of questions for you. Do you have anything at all that you would like to add? Do you have any questions for me? How are you feeling? As a reminder, here are a few support resources you can access as needed. Thank you sincerely for your time and your honesty. I know firsthand that this topic is not always easy to discuss, and I am very grateful for your generosity. Please feel free to reach out if any questions arise, need more support, or want to add anything.

This interview guide draws from the work of several scholars (i.e., Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Kim, 2016; Smith, 2010).

Appendix K: Ethics Certificate

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

H-08-25-11692 - REG-11692 - Certificat d'approbation éthique / Certificate of Ethics Approval

(English message follows)

Cher/Chère Priya Narine,

Veillez trouver ci-joint le certificat d'approbation éthique pour le projet intitulé «Exploring the Impact of Organizational Communication on Athletes Who Have Experienced Interpersonal Violence in Sport ».

Le certificat est valide jusqu'au : 04-09-2026

Recherche financée : veuillez faire suivre une copie du certificat au [Service de gestion de la recherche](#).

Si vous avez des questions, n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec le Bureau d'éthique à ethique@uottawa.ca ou en composant le 613-562-5387.

Vous pouvez voir votre demande en vous connectant à votre compte [eReviews](#).

Cordialement,

Coordonateur / Coordinator
Coordonnateur de l'éthique

Ceci est une réponse automatisée, merci de ne pas répondre à ce courriel.

Dear Priya Narine,

Please find attached the certificate of ethics approval for your research project titled "Exploring the Impact of Organizational Communication on Athletes Who Have Experienced Interpersonal Violence in Sport ".

This certificate is valid until: 04-09-2026

Funded research: A reminder that you must provide a copy of this certificate to [Research Management Services](#).

If you have any questions, please contact the Ethics Office at ethics@uottawa.ca or by telephone at 613-562-5387.

You can view your project at any time by logging into [eReviews](#).

Best regards,

Coordonateur / Coordinator
Ethics Coordinator

This is an automated message. Please do not reply directly to this email.

Attachement(s) / Attachment(s)

[approvalLetter1757094714197.pdf](#)