Contrapower Harassment: Experiences of Sport Management Female Faculty

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College sport in general is typically a male-dominated field (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). The passage of Title IX in 1972 paved the way for girls and women to increase participation in sports from the youth level to scholastic level to the collegiate level. However, the overall percentage of women in leadership or authority positions (i.e., coaching, athletic director) has decreased (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). The lack of women in authority positions in collegiate athletics may lead to the perception that women should also not be in positions of authority (i.e., faculty members) in sport management classrooms. Issues between female faculty members and students—either male or female—may arise both in and out of the classroom in the form of sexual harassment and incivility by the student toward the female faculty member. These actions are known collectively a contrapower harassment.

Sexual harassment and incivility can take several forms, but is typically the unwanted attention one might receive from another individual (Rospenda et al., 1998). This unwanted attention is often experienced by the employee or subordinate—not the supervisor or person of power. In the case of contrapower harassment, the supervisor, or superior (i.e., faculty member) is the victim of the unwanted harassment and incivility by the other person (i.e., student, Grauerholz, 1989). Sexual harassment might be verbal (i.e., comments on appearance), non-verbal (i.e., feedback on student evaluations), or physical (i.e., touching, hugging) that are deemed sexual in nature (Benson, 1984; Grauerholz, 1989; Lampman, 2012). Incivility might include disrespect toward the female faculty member, but can also include bullying (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Lampman, 2012). As with sexual harassment, incivility can be expressed by students in several ways. Some may use physical cues by rolling their eyes or sleeping in class. Verbal incivility might be comments insinuating that the female faculty member is not “qualified” simply because she is a woman in the sport industry. Written comments in emails and end-of-course evaluations might be confrontational and provide a lack of respect toward the female faculty member as well.. The extreme end of incivility is bullying (Lampman, Phelps, Bancroft, & Beneke, 2009).

Bandura’s (1962, 1977) social learning theory suggests that people learn by observing others. Once the behavior is learned, it can lead to imitation and exhibiting the learned behavior. Each sport management student brings a unique set of life experiences to the classroom. However, women in an authority position in a sport setting may be a new and unfamiliar experience for students based on previous experiences as a child and teenager. It is then imperative then to ensure contrapower harassment does not occur so students will perceive this as an acceptable behavior.

The purpose of this study is to examine the prevalence of contrapower harassment between female sport management faculty members and students and to also examine the types of contrapower harassment experienced. Strategies for managing and preventing contrapower harassment are explored as well. Qualitative interviews was utilized in order to gain deeper insight into the inner thoughts and experiences of study participants (Corbin & Straus, 2008). Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with 10 female sport management faculty members with less than 10 years of experience in higher education in June and July 2014. Interviews are grounded in discussion, and the open-ended format of the interview questions provided an opportunity for the participants to express their feelings, emotions, and perceptions on contrapower harassment in their classroom and academic setting (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Interviews were transcribed and formatted for analysis by the principle investigator and were sent to the participants for member checking. A constant comparative content analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts. Segments of data are compared to one another in order to find similarities and differences during this type of analysis (Merriam, 2009). "Meaningful and manageable themes" were created through the categorization of quotes of analogous experiences or challenges (Patton, 1987, p. 150). Rospenda et al.
(1998) used similar methods to examine how gender, race and class influence contrapower sexual harassment in the workplace.

All 10 of the participants received their doctorate in a Sport Management related area or a closely related field (i.e., Educational Leadership). In addition, seven of the 10 participants have sport industry experience (i.e., intercollegiate coaching, athletic administration, teaching physical education, motorsports, the National Football League, the Women's National Basketball Association). The participants hold the rank of assistant or associate professor.

Nine of the ten participants experienced some form of contrapower harassment. The one participant who hadn't experienced it attributes the absence of contrapower harassment from students to a mandatory department orientation for all sport management students which is conducted at the beginning of the fall semester. The participants reported contrapower harassment did exist as they received verbal and written comments of incivility from both male and female students. These included comments about their content knowledge, teaching ability, and gender. They also reported nonverbal or physical incivility such as sleeping in class or engaging in non-class activities. Female sport management faculty members also experienced incivility from other (often male) faculty members. This incivility included sexist comments and making a mockery out of contrapower situation experienced by the female faculty. Participants discussed written and verbal comments of sexual harassment they received from students. Written comments about their physical appearance and clothing choice were common on course evaluations. Occasionally these sexual comments were graphic in nature, creating discomfort for the female faculty member. Finally, the participants discussed ways in which they dealt with contrapower harassment from students. Issues of contrapower harassment were handled in several different ways (e.g., confronting the student in class, e-mailing the student outside of class, holding meetings with the student and department head, or ignoring the student's comments) but all women agreed the sooner the issue was addressed with the harasser (i.e., the student), the quicker the situation could be diffused and everyone could move forward.