“It doesn't take much:” Dissemination of Violence Prevention Messaging by High School Athletes on Girls' Sports Teams

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Abstract

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Efforts to prevent sexual violence are increasingly focused on community-level programming and change, rather than intervention at the individual level. Such programs often rely on dissemination of prevention messaging by community influencers or leaders. Research shows athletes often occupy this role within high school environments and thus can be powerful messengers for social change – but less is known about the role of female athletes as messengers for violence prevention. This study explores participant dissemination of Athletes As Leaders, a sexual violence prevention program specifically designed for female-identified high school athletes. In qualitative interviews, athlete participants identified three primary dissemination strategies (sharing a message, intervening, and role modeling), as well as barriers and facilitators experience in the process.

INTRODUCTION

Background

An estimated one in five women and one in fifteen men will experience sexual violence in their lifetimes (Basile et al, 2016). These numbers are higher for marginalized populations, including people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and young people (RAINN, 2018b). In addition to the experience of violence itself, survivors of sexual assault or relationship abuse are at increased risk of poor health concerns, including depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, substance use, and others (ibid). Beyond individual impacts, sexual violence undermines community safety and perpetuates inequity: fear of and trauma following violence can have economic and financial impacts through lost labor and strains on medical, social service, and other systems (NSVRC, 2016). Communities marked by high rates of inequity, such as that which contributes to sexual violence and results from it, have poorer health, longevity, community cohesion, and trust (Wilkinson, 2006).

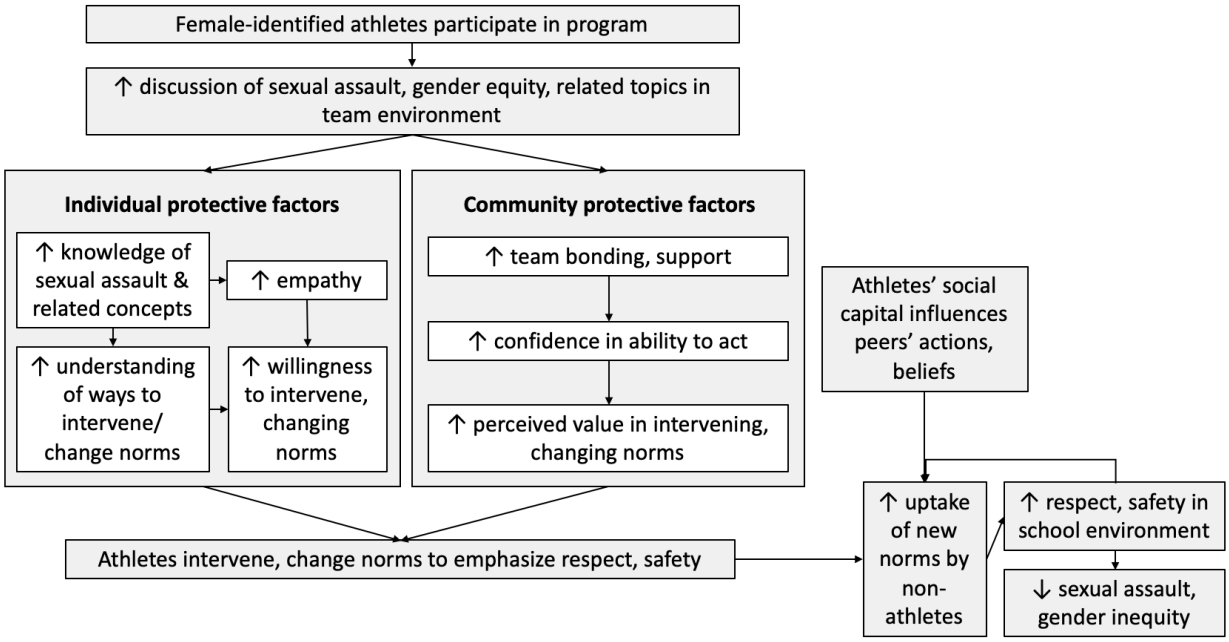
Violence is, however, preventable. Much is known about risk and protective factors for both victimization and perpetration of violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018a), and many violence prevention programs are built on the risk and protective factor framework. One such program is Athletes As Leaders (AAL), created by staff at the Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress (HCSATS) in Seattle, WA. AAL is a leadership program for athletes on girls' high school sports teams which "aims to empower female-identified youth to take an active role in promoting healthy relationships and ending sexual violence" (Athletes As Leaders, 2018). The program's objectives are (1) to increase girls' knowledge of social norms and systems which support sexual violence; (2) to challenge negative gender stereotypes by building a strong girl-positive culture within teams; (3) to increase

athletes' confidence in their leadership and ability to make social change; and (4) to promote wider action within school communities to prevent gender inequity and violence. The ultimate goals of the program are to foster healthy relationships and end gender-based violence.

AAL is a 10-week program designed to work in conjunction with Coaching Boys into Men, a similar, evidence-based program for male-serving youth sports teams (Coaching Boys Into Men, 2019). In weekly 20-30 minute AAL sessions, teams discuss topics connected to the central focus of gender norms and their relationship to sexual assault (see Appendix A for curriculum overview). By exploring the social norms and systems supporting these forms of violence, the program helps athletes consider how their behavior influences others in their communities and how to use that influence to support social norms of respect, safety, and equity for all.

The desired outcomes of AAL are violence prevention and social norms change. The program aims to achieve these outcomes by bolstering protective factors at the individual and community levels, factors associated with reducing sexual violence perpetration (see Figure 1). For example, AAL builds a strong and positive connection with a group of peers, enables youth discussion of sensitive and important issues without shame or stigma, and encourages empathy for others – all factors associated with decreased risk of perpetrating violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018a; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018c). Furthermore, AAL presumes athletes' social capital and status within the high school environment will allow dissemination and uptake of new social norms.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of Athletes As Leaders



Among the many existing violence prevention programs and curricula, AAL is innovative in its emphasis on female leadership, its use of athletes as social influencers, and its focus on making broad-based community-level change. First, many prevention programs aimed at women and girls focus on risk-reduction or how to prevent being *victims* of violence: for example, training women in self-defense or to use pepper spray to thwart attempted assaults. Instead of seeing women only as potential victims, AAL seeks to engage women and girls as leaders in challenging expectations and norms of behavior for all genders, thereby changing the overall social acceptance of violence. For example, AAL acknowledges and challenges how behaviors by girls – such as rumor spreading – can contribute to environments conducive to gender stereotypes and unhealthy relationship dynamics, which in turn contribute to sexual violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018a). AAL emphasizes girls' power to change these dynamics and works to develop girls' skills in doing so. AAL is also unique in its focus on female athletes as messengers and influencers. AAL seeks to leverage the social standing of athletes to more effectively and widely disseminate positive messages. Since athletes are often

leaders and influencers within their schools, their embodiment of AAL messages may have a greater impact on uptake of these behaviors and beliefs than if disseminated via other messengers or methods, per diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 1995). Relatedly, AAL focuses on community-level norm change. The social-ecological model theorizes that interplay between different levels of the systems of our society means changes made at the higher, more macro levels (like community and society) will influence experiences on the more micro levels (like individuals and relationships) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Changing social norms to be intolerant of violence, rather than focusing only on individual behaviors, is one example of such community-level social change. Therefore, rather than focusing on individual behavior change alone, which often requires resource-intensive small group or one-on-one programming, AAL aims to shift community-wide social norms and behaviors. By focusing on changing the social context, which in turn shapes individuals' decisions and behaviors, such community-level focused programs seek to achieve the same results in a more efficient manner (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018b).

These unique factors make AAL an exciting advance in violence prevention; however, literature focused on these unique factors, especially in combination, is scarce, thereby necessitating evaluation of both implementation and impact of this program. This implementation evaluation specifically explores dissemination of AAL messages and norms by athlete participants. The research questions are:

1. Are athletes disseminating social norms or standards of behavior in accordance with AAL values in non-athletic settings or with non-participant peers?
2. What are the characteristics and attitudes of athletes who act as disseminators, compared to those who do not?

3. What strategies do athletes use to disseminate new norms and standards to non-athletes?
4. What barriers and facilitators do athletes encounter when they attempt to disseminate?

Existing literature

Little research has been done on high school athletes' roles on impacting social norms, particularly that of female athletes on issues of sexual violence. Additionally, programs emphasizing social influencers or messengers have primarily been evaluated on the individual level only, meaning little is known about the effectiveness of such models on achieving the goal of community-level social change discussed above.

No research has been published on Athletes As Leaders. However, internal results from an evaluation of a national pilot of the program found statistically significant increases in participants' ability to identify abusive relationship behaviors, in their self-confidence and self-image, and in their belief in gender equity (Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 2018b). At the original implementation site in Seattle, similar positive results have been consistently found across multiple years of programming with multiple teams (see Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 2015; Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 2016; Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 2017; Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 2018a). These findings suggest the program is indeed effective at changing the attitudes and beliefs of program participants themselves.

Additionally, a cluster-randomized controlled trial of Coaching Boys into Men, the companion program for male athletes, found the program increased athletes' intention to intervene as bystanders (Miller et al, 2012). Heather McCauley and colleagues (2014) additionally found male athletes' perpetration of dating violence and beliefs in gender equity

varied by sport. This underscores the heterogeneous nature of sports teams and athletes as a group, and challenges the assumption that all athletes are appropriate and influential social messengers, a question explored in this evaluation.

While research on athletes as social influencers is less common, the strategy of using influencers to disseminate strategies and norms to non-participants has been shown to be successful in various settings. This strategy is rooted in diffusion of innovation theory, which posits new ideas begin with and are spread by trendsetters in a community who, by way of that status and using social networks, influence the larger community's beliefs and behaviors (Rogers, 1995). For example, Popular Opinion Leader, an HIV prevention program, uses 'community popular opinion leaders,' community members "whose views are naturally observed and emulated," to promote safe sex practices among men having sex with men (NIMH Collaborative HIV/STD Prevention Group, 2007, S60). Green Dot, a bystander intervention program aimed at reducing interpersonal violence, relies on 'early adopters,' influential leaders in a school or community, to adopt the program's principles and subsequently disseminate intervention strategies and behaviors to the wider community (Cook-Craig et al, 2014). Both programs have been shown to be effective (see Coker et al, 2011; Coker et al, 2014; Kelly et al, 1991; Kelly, 2004).

These programs require identifying leaders who are influential in various communities within a school or campus; AAL instead assumes athletes are social influencers because of the social status athletes often occupy within the high school environment. A number of studies support the assertion that athletes enjoy particularly high social status and influence. In his research on adolescent social life, James Coleman (1961) asked students how they'd like to be remembered after leaving high school; the most popular answer for young men was as the star

athlete (most young women were not allowed to participate in sports at the time). Several subsequent studies have replicated these findings for male athletes but older literature on female athletes' roles is somewhat contradictory (see Kane, 1988; Holland and Andre, 1994) and generally lacking in more current research. In one of the only recent analyses, Clopton (2012) found social networks among female collegiate athletes were more developed than those of their male counterparts, and that differences existed between the networks of athletes in individual- versus team-based sports. Overall, adequate evaluation of whether athletes' social influence holds across all genders and sports, questions central to this evaluation, is lacking.

Given these gaps and the demonstrated need for more effective and comprehensive violence prevention strategies, this thesis explores dissemination strategies used by female athletes to share messages learned through Athletes As Leaders. As the field of violence prevention moves away from targeting individual behavior change and toward overarching community-level interventions, it is essential we understand if – and how – dissemination of such messaging is happening. Doing so has implications for determining whether high school athletes, across all sports and all genders, are effective disseminators of violence prevention messaging – or indeed, if social diffusion is an effective strategy for changing attitudes towards and trends of violence in high school settings in general. This understanding is essential for designing effective violence prevention initiatives, especially at the community level, and maximizing the efficiency and impact thereof.

METHODS

This multi-methods study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand whether and how athletes may be disseminating Athletes As Leaders messaging and

corresponding social norms within their high school. Multi-methods design was used to capture both athletes' qualitative assessments and perceptions of the program and their responses to it, as well as characteristics related to key constructs in the implementation model.

Study setting, population, and recruitment

This study was conducted between January and May 2019 at a public high school serving a diverse student body of approximately 1800 students in the Seattle metropolitan area (Seattle Public Schools, 2018a). For the 2017-18 school year, the school's student body was 16% Asian/Asian American, 23% Black, 8% Hispanic/Latinx, 1% Native American/Alaska Native, and 43% White; 9% reported two or more races (Seattle Public Schools, 2018b). The student body was approximately 48% male and 52% female (Seattle Public Schools, 2018c); data reflecting non-binary students were not available. Twenty-seven percent qualified for free and reduced-price lunch, 4% received bilingual services, and 8% received some form of special education services (ibid). Approximately 43% of students at this high school participate in athletics (ProPublica, 2016). Data obtained from school staff in May 2019 show 469 boys and 321 girls participating in school-based athletics, representing 57% of male students and 35% of female students (C. Lynch, personal communication, May 2019).

Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress and Seattle Public Schools (SPS) have a memorandum of understanding allowing evaluation activities as part of the partnership with this high school. Permission to conduct this evaluation was granted by SPS's legal representation. This evaluation was submitted to the University of Washington Institutional Review Board for approval, and having been found to not meet the definitions of research, was determined not to require such review or approval.

The population of interest for this evaluation is student athletes at this high school who have participated in AAL as part of a girls' sports team. At the conclusion of the Winter 2018-19 season, when recruitment began, AAL had been implemented with approximately 500 athletes over four years; duplicate counts of repeat participants who have received program multiple times are represented in that number, and additionally, some have since graduated from or left the school. Participants were recruited using nonprobability sampling of athletes who have participated in AAL: purposive sampling was used include athletes from various teams; of different grade levels and ages; who were mentored by different facilitators; and for whom different lengths of time have passed since participation in AAL.

Three methods were used simultaneously to recruit participants. Invitations were disseminated by coaches of teams currently and recently participating in AAL. Additionally, an announcement was included in the morning announcements broadcast daily. Flyers were also posted throughout the school on public bulletin boards. (A fourth strategy, although not explicitly undertaken, was word-of-mouth among student athletes.) All recruitment methods asked interested participants to initiate contact with the author (LH). The author screened participants to ensure compliance with inclusion and exclusion criteria; emailed the consent form to review; and arranged an in-person meeting time. Inclusion criteria were the ability to participate in an interview in English, as well as read and write in English to facilitate completion of the pre-interview questionnaire and give informed consent. Wards of the state were excluded due to more complex permissions needed to access that population. Participants were given a $30 gift card to compensate their time and effort.

Quantitative Measures

The quantitative data for this evaluation were gathered via a questionnaire administered to participants in-person prior to their completion of the interview. (See Appendix B for questionnaire.) This questionnaire, which took approximately 10 minutes to complete, included two types of questions: demographic questions and questions about attitudes and knowledge. Demographic questions asked participants to self-identify their gender[1]; race/ethnicity; age now and at first contact with AAL; grade level now and at first contact with AAL; sport(s) in which they participate; sport(s) in which they've received AAL programing; number of times they've participated in AAL; and whether they held/hold a formal leadership role on their sports team(s) or elsewhere at the school.

The second part of the questionnaire, exploring personal attitudes and knowledge, was compiled from existing validated instruments which measure gender stereotyping, self-concept, community efficacy, and empathy. These are key constructs in the AAL conceptual model. (See Figure 1; see Appendix C for details of validated measures.) In the questionnaire, athletes were asked 4-8 questions related to each of these constructs and asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree;" reverse-coded questions were included (see Appendix B for questionnaire).

Gender stereotyping. Gender stereotyping reflects adherence with traditional conceptions of a gender binary and gender-determined roles and behaviors. Athletes As Leaders aims to reduce participants' gender stereotyping and promote gender equity. Lower scores on this scale reflect more adherence with stereotyping, while higher scores reflect more gender-equitable beliefs.

[1] Although AAL is implemented with girls' sports teams, some athletes on the team may not identify as a cisgender female.

Self-concept. Self-concept is defined as one's beliefs about themselves, including self-esteem, self-confidence, and one's perceptions of how others view them. Higher scores reflect stronger self-concept, while lower scores indicate less confidence, self-esteem, or belief in others' positive perceptions of them.

Empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and relate to the feelings and experiences of others. As a protective factor, empathy can help prevent victimization by or perpetration of violence. Higher scores on this scale indicate higher levels of empathic responses and thus reflect the presence of this protective factor.

Community efficacy. Community efficacy is described community cohesion and collective responsibility, and reflects the ability of community members to influence and shape the behavior of others (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997). Athletes' beliefs about community efficacy – both the receptiveness of their community to their ideas and the community's capacity to change – is an important construct in AAL's conceptual model. Higher scores on this scale indicate a high level of cohesion and support, while lower scores reflect less perceived connectivity within the community.

Data collection and analysis

Ten athletes consented to participate in this study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from each participant: each participant completed a written questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. All data were collected by the author at the high school in question during advisory period (similar to home room), before school, or after school. Data were recorded using only numerical identifiers. At the in-person meeting, the researcher generated a three-digit identifier for each participant, which was recorded on the written questionnaire and orally at the start of the interview.

Due to the small size of this sample and the goals of this evaluation, statistical analysis was not performed on the quantitative data collected via the questionnaire. Instead, descriptive analysis of demographic information (e.g. grade level, race) was conducted and mean scores and standard deviations for the relevant quantitative measures (e.g. empathy, gender stereotyping) were calculated.

Qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with participants after completion of the written questionnaire. Interview questions were developed in collaboration with HCSATS staff and faculty advisors. (See Appendix D for interview guide.) One-on-one interviews lasted 13 to 34 minutes. All interviewees consented to audio recording. Each audio recording was transcribed and entered into Dedoose online software. Dedoose was then used to perform inductive content analysis on the transcripts. Interviews were coded by two coders, the author and a trained second coder, and intercoder reconciliation undertaken in instances of disagreement.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Characteristic	***n (of 10)***
Race	
White	3
Black/African American	4
Asian American	3
Age	
18	6
17	3
15	1
Current grave level	
9^{th}	1
11^{th}	5
12^{th}	4
Number of participations in AAL	
One time	3
Two times	4
Three times	1
Four times	2
Average sports played	**1.9**
Average sports played with AAL	**1.5**
Leadership position in athletics	
Yes	3
No	7
Leadership position elsewhere	
Yes	2
No	8

RESULTS

Ten athletes were interviewed in March 2019 (see Table 1). These interviews yielded information about (1) participants' support of or buy-in to Athletes As Leaders; (2) who identified as disseminating AAL

content or messaging and who did not; (3) how such dissemination took place; and (4) the barriers and facilitators athletes might encounter as they attempt to change social norms.

1. Participants' support of Athletes As Leaders

To understand if athletes are disseminating Athletes As Leaders messages, first they were asked about their understanding of and agreement with those messages, with the assumption they would be more likely to disseminate content they understand well and with which they agree. Athletes were first asked to provide an overall assessment of the program, sharing both a positive and a negative aspect of the program. They were then asked if their mindset, beliefs, or behavior had changed since their participation in AAL. Additionally, athletes were asked whether athletes (and themselves in particular) were seen as influential and could thus serve as effective messengers within their high school. Finally, the written questionnaire evaluated athletes' adherence to gender stereotyping as a measurement of their understanding of and agreement with AAL's gender equity framework.

1a. Participants' overall assessment of Athletes As Leaders

Study participants made many positive assessments of the program. Much of the positive feedback from participants centered Athletes As Leaders facilitating space for conversations (a) not happening in other spaces in their lives and (b) seen by them as important. Athletes credited AAL with creating a girl-positive environment where it was possible to recognize and discuss gender stereotypes and other discrimination. The creation of a "safe" space for such conversations was important: "we're able to say things without upsetting others, or, like, getting called out on." Participants saw value in being able to "talk openly" "about their views," and "bring their own perspectives" to the conversations, especially in an all-female environment. According to the interviewees, many of the topics discussed in AAL were "taboo" in other

spaces, and thus AAL served as "a good resource for students who don't have a lot of access or […] exposure to [these] topics."

Another commonly-cited positive attribute of the program was the facilitation of team bonding: for example, one athlete said, "I like […] the community it brings out in our team." Another participant shared a story in which teammate "was really vulnerable" with her, which, to the participant, indicated the teammate "obviously recognized this was a safe space because she was being so open [and] could tell that we all supported each other." One participant credited the creation of such an environment to AAL being delivered to a sports team: "if the same curriculum was delivered to a group of people that wasn't as close as a sports team, it wouldn't be impactful, because people wouldn't be willing to be vulnerable."

The most frequently cited negative of the program was timing: two participants cited before or after practice as a challenging time due to other commitments. One participant wished for longer sessions, because "when we get into a good discussion, it's all like, time!" Two participants cited repetition of the program as a drawback: "if you already done it once, it's kinda tedious to do it at every sport [and…] it's kind of boring at some point." Other drawbacks cited were the hypothetical nature of the program and scenarios explored in it, and surface-level topics groups might not take seriously. Another participant said, "in some ways the discussions feel a little forced, um, with like, questions that kind of lead to having correct answers."

1b. Perceived mindset and behavior change

Athletes also discussed the perceived impact of Athletes As Leaders participation on their own beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. Participants identified two general perceptions of how AAL impacted them: (a) to prompt a shift in mindset, such as awareness of problems or beliefs about their importance, and (b) to prompt behavior change, such as a change in the way athletes treated

one another or their friends. All athletes cited either a change in mindset or behavior, and many cited both (see Table 2).

Table 2. Perceived impact on participants' mindset and behavior

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Mindset change	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Behavior change	•	•	•	•	•	•				•

Nine of ten interviewees stated Athletes As Leaders had some positive impact on their mindset change, although the perceived extent of this change differed across participants. The participant who stated AAL hadn't impacted on her mindset attributed this to agreement with AAL principles prior to participation. Others also entered the program with basic knowledge of the topics, but found value in AAL nonetheless. Some of these positive impacts were AAL helping "broaden" or "deepen" preexisting ideas. One athlete stated her "vocabulary grew." Multiple athletes found the team-based approach beneficial to their own learning: one said "verbalizing as a team" helped her "think about [her] individual actions," while another said "hearing what [my] team […] thought [assisted in] broadening my ideas and strengthening them." A softball player said her ideas "developed" through AAL and she had gained confidence in those beliefs: "now I feel more strongly about [them], and I feel more […] empowered to be able to be like, this is my opinion and I believe this is true. And have reasons to back it up."

Participants also gave particular examples of these shifts in mindset or belief. Like the softball player above, a basketball player also grew in self-confidence: "I feel more confident of being a girl, and playing a sport that's mainly for guys [and] wanting to do […] things that people think that I can't do […] like be a firefighter." The most common change was an increase in awareness, of both the problems AAL addresses and their impact on others in their communities. One young woman said she'd "always been a neutral person" who didn't involve

herself with things that didn't directly affect her. Now, she says, she sees these actions "[do] affect me, […] it's all around me, and it happens to most of my friends. […] I'm very aware of it now." Another began recognizing some negative behaviors within herself: "society [tells us] we have to be more judgmental towards women and their figures and how they dress and how they act. And I think that once I started like, watching the videos and like, talking, and I realized that these were kind of inadvertently in my head, and I was like, unconsciously thinking these things towards other women."

These shifts in mindset were frequently linked to, at a minimum, the *intention* of behavior change. For example, a self-proclaimed "unfiltered" and outspoken participant said, "even though you're being truthful, you gotta take other people's feelings into consideration [and AAL] helped me do that." The young woman who identified her own sexist thoughts said, "once I realized that, I was able to consciously start to – I mean, I still struggle with it sometimes […] – but I'm more conscious of it, and […] I know when I'm doing it, so I can stop myself." Similarly, another noted the value of assessing one's own behavior, asking "how often I do exhibit that behavior, without noticing, subconsciously? […] I took that and looked back and thought, did I do that stuff today? And I was like, I did, wow. That really helped me self-reflect. Little things like that are still really beneficial." Increased internal and external awareness and self-reflection were the primary mindset changes experienced by participants.

Seven athletes indicated some level of external behavior change following AAL participation, focused on being more kind and less judgmental, being more vigilant or aware of potential problems, and gossip. Three athletes shared examples of how, since AAL, they attempted to be more kind and less judgmental towards others. One said, "I'm the kind of person, if I see it, I'm gonna say it. […But] I gotta stop and think about what I'm gonna say […] I need

to give words of encouragement instead of, you know, doing that down-talk." Another shared, "I tried to be just less judgmental about people. And […] if I was being judgmental, try to keep it not, like, noticeable to everyone else." Additionally, the same participant said she "posted [on social media] about […] being more yourself [and] trying to not, like, change into what society is expecting." The third was trying to more genuinely compliment her friends, in hopes "they [would] feel loved and cared for." These behavior changes – or attempts to change – are aligned with the mindset shifts or increased awareness previously discussed.

Relatedly, two participants shared another way their behavior changed due to their increased awareness of the problems discussed in AAL: increased vigilance around these topics, particularly around relationship dynamics. One said, "I definitely […] was watching what my friends say about [their relationships]" after learning about healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics. The other said she was more attuned to friends' problems: "[previously] I'm probably gonna overlook it and only talk about what I want to talk about. And it's really good to just get in there, and you know, check in, hey are you okay, are you, if you need someone to talk to I'm here."

Two participants shared changes in their behavior around rumor spreading or gossiping. Neither participant fully stopped gossiping; instead, both paid additional attention to the scope or content of their rumor spreading. One said, "I'm always like, cautious of [sharing a touchy rumor…]. Like, it would go no further [than my friend group]." The other said, "every time I like, say something about a person, I catch myself and say, oh but I don't want to spread rumors, I don't know if that's true, don't use me as a source, I don't know if that's true."

1c. Athletes as leaders?

Study participants were also asked about the role of athletes in influencing social norms at their high school (see Table 3), per Athletes As Leaders' conceptual model (see Figure 1). Four participants generally agreed athletes were seen as influential within the school: "athletes […are] looked up to because they [are] a very central part of the school." Another elaborated on why athletes were influential, saying, "the respect that athletes get within the school makes them more susceptible to being listened to all the time […]. I think that athletes do have an upper hand in being listened to in class conversations and being taken more seriously if they do point out the stuff that [AAL] talks about that is wrong." Another, referencing the segregated environment at their school, said, "[groups] don't really overlap, except in like elective classes and sports, which is one of the things why I think is really important to be able to do this in athletics."

Table 3. Participants' assessment of athletes' status as influential messengers

	P1	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**P5**	**P6**	**P7**	**P8**	**P9**	**P10**
Yes	•					•		•	•	
No			•							•
It depends		•		•	•		•			

Four participants expressed skepticism that athletes were de facto social influencers at their high school. These athletes thought *some* athletes might be influential, but that social influence was not an attribute universally held by *all* athletes – in other words, athlete status alone did not automatically bestow social influence. One said simply, "I don't necessarily see athletes as the top people, like, there's a range within every sport of, like, people who are really cool and people who aren't." Athletes referenced other groups with influence within the school, including formal groups or clubs ("our government has a big impact and also our music program"). Some suggested other factors, such as grade level or participation in other leadership activities, might mitigate or enhance the impact of an athlete's influence.

Another factor cited was the sport in which athletes participated: different sports afforded the participants visibility and public acknowledgement as an athlete and as a leader. Half the interviewees specifically referenced football and basketball players as having the most social status and influence at school. [2] These two sports were seen to "just get more attention" and "more credibility" than other sports, and athletes on those teams were "treated more like celebrities than other sports." Importantly, perceived influence differed within a single sport, too. Among basketball players, boys were seen as more popular than girls: "boys' basketball and just football have the biggest impact because everyone cheers them on, and everybody's gonna go to their games regardless. So, I feel like they have the biggest impact." Popularity of the team or sport led to attendance at events and thus a higher profile for those athletes. For example, one interviewee said, "it's more like […] certain sports teams over others. Like, basketball is definitely a more popular sport, football is a more popular. Swimming, you don't get a lot of like, fans at swimming meets." Another said, "the athletes that are more central and people tend to know, I feel like they have more leadership weight."

In discussing which sports get more credibility, none of the girls explicitly raised sexism as a dynamic, despite most of them agreeing boys' sports, particularly basketball and football, got more attention and held more influence at their high school (and despite gender equity being a foundational topic discussed in Athletes As Leaders). Participants attributed popularity, and its corresponding awarding of influence, to sheer numbers: "if a lot more people go to football events and *that happens* to be a guys' sport team, then guys will have more leadership" (emphasis added). This athlete did not suggest sexism was at play, but instead, interest in sports events themselves was the driving force behind attendance and influence of athletes. Another

[2] Football is a coed team, with no female athletes currently participating; basketball has boys' and girls' teams.

said of the differential interest in girls' versus boys' basketball and attendance at games, "the boys, they can dunk, they can do all this. The girls... it's kind of...they're just shooting, so people think it's boring." But another said, "at [our high school], it's like no one really hears about the girls' team, and it's sad, because the girls do better than the boys. So, I mean, they sleep on the girls all… until they find out one girls' team is gonna go to state, and then it's like, let's hop on the bandwagon, let's cheer them on." Some athletes saw differential popularity and influence as a mechanism of skill, while others saw other factors impacting attendance at events and esteem for athletes.

These quotes illustrate an environment of presumed male leadership within the school. Unfortunately, one athlete said, "[male athletes] don't really share the most positive messages." This concern was raised by multiple athletes, implying athletes (or some athletes) *do* have social capital to be influencers. One participant underscored the need for AAL saying, "a lot of the topics [AAL] does address are sort of normalized in a lot of sports and team culture, especially with boys' sports. So being about to have this be mandatory, and making athletes sit through it and get uncomfortable is really, I think, necessary. Because this isn't talked about at school." This participant agrees participation in athletics yields influence, albeit at times a negative one.

Two participants rejected the idea of athletes as social messengers outright. One said, "to be honest, I thought [the idea of athletes as messengers] was a little, like, so stereotypical […] I don't know, the thing that came into my mind was like, the jocks, and then the rest." Another participant said, "it's not always athletes. Like, I know there's a lot of people who don't do sports at all, but are […] leaders, I guess."

Whether or not they agreed athletes could potentially be influential, a frequently-cited factor impacting school-wide influence was the presence of a large, segregated student

population at the school, which might not lend itself to a single group of people acting as influencers. One athlete said, "[our high school] is really segregated. […] You've got the AP program, and then within the AP program there's like different groups that kind of are associated as cool or whatever. And then within the regular, gen ed program, there's a different group." Another said, "[our high school] is just so incredibly big […] Maybe at a smaller school where everyone knows each other […] But at "[our high school…] they're so clique-y, you know, everyone's in their own group, everyone has their own dramas, and no one as a whole school is...like, there isn't one big drama. Or there isn't something that everyone does, no one cares." Similarly, one participant said, "a lot of the time, the only reason people know I'm in a sports program is because I have to leave class early sometimes." If identity as an athlete makes someone influential, it must be a public identity in order to wield that influence, and this participant suggests that, given the size and diversity of the school, athlete identity is not always publicly known, undermining the ability to use it to influence norms.

To these athletes, the size and segregation of the large student body limited the impact any one athlete might have on a group of their peers. This lack of community cohesion was also present in the scores on the community efficacy scale, part of the written questionnaire (see Appendix B for questionnaire, Appendix C for measures). These questions yielded the lowest scores among the four measures on the questionnaire, with a mean of 3.1 (SD 0.66).

1d. Gender stereotyping scale

In addition to positive assessment of AAL and perceived positive impact on both mindset and behavior change, athletes responded to questions measuring their gender stereotyping as part of the written survey (see Appendix B for questionnaire, Appendix C for measures). The mean

score was 4.4 (SD 0.43), indicating fairly gender-equitable beliefs among this group in accordance with Athletes As Leaders' messaging.

2. Who disseminates?

All but one participant identified, either explicitly or through their relayed actions, as a disseminator of Athletes As Leaders messaging. This study found athletes were disseminating across grade levels, sports, and racial/ethnic identities. Athletes who had participated in AAL once were disseminating, as were those who participated multiple times. Those who held formal leadership positions on athletic teams (n=3) and elsewhere at school (n=2, who also held athletic-related leadership) and most of those who had not held such positions were also disseminating.

As measured by the written questionnaire (see Appendix B for questionnaire, Appendix C for measures), participants' mean self-concept score was 4.2 (SD 0.43) and mean empathy score was 3.9 (SD 0.62). Athletes with low and high scores on these measures were disseminating; the one non-disseminating athlete ranked highly on self-concept (4.6) but had the lowest score on empathy (2.8) among the group.

Participants were asked if they thought of themselves as influential. Half the participants agreed they did, to varying extents, have social influence over others, mostly their immediate friends. One said, "I'll see people around and they'll talk to me, like I'll never have met you but they'll be like, oh hey good game, and I'll be like, oh thanks. [laughter] I never met you, but...kinda like being a role model for the people who recognize you." Another said, "I use my social media a lot to, like, say [my beliefs] and provide resources, and I think a lot of people actually look at them. And I'm happy about that." No participants denied the suggestion they might have influence over others, but for some, the idea was surprising: after sharing a story of a friend stating admiration for her, one said, "[before that,] I never thought about myself that way."

3. Methods of dissemination

Athletes As Leaders posits athletes can change the social norms of their environment through use of their social standing to influence the behaviors of their peers. This study found this happens in three primary ways: (1) sharing a message or content learned in Athletes As Leaders with non-program participants via conversation, in person or online; (2) intervening or speaking up in a negative situation; and (3) role modeling positive behavior, often contrary to existing norms. Six athletes stated they had role modeled an AAL-related behavior or value; seven had intervened in a situation contrary to AAL messaging; and five had shared messages or AAL content with others (see Table 4). Eight participants cited six specific examples of a time they disseminated an Athletes As Leaders-related message via one of these three methods. One athlete said they had done so but didn't have a specific example, and one said they had been in situations where they contemplated intervening but decided not to ("I personally haven't intervened […] but I've like, seen those and thought about it.").

Table 4. Participants' dissemination methods and examples

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Shared message		•	•		•	•			•	
Intervened	•		•	•		•		•	•	•
Role modeled	•	•	•		•	•				•
Specific example	•	•	•		•	•		•	•	•
Generic, no example				•						

Three athletes who shared messages via conversation did so in person, and two did so via online social media, primarily in the form of discussing or sharing the topic of the AAL session of the day. One participant shared a scenario from a video show in AAL with a friend: "[I asked] what would you do if you were in that position? And we just had a deep talk. […] It's also good to hear two different sides of what people are thinking. […] That was some knowledge."

All seven examples of intervening or speaking up were in response to something someone else said (rather than an action, for example): four were in response to a peer's comments, and three in response to a teacher or adult. Three of the four peer-related instances were in person; one was online. One example of an in-person peer-related intervention came from a gymnast, who heard a teammate spreading a rumor about the gymnast's ex-girlfriend, and, following the AAL session on rumor spreading, confronted her teammate. The other peer-based examples were in response to statements that were "mean" (e.g., bullying) or dismissive (e.g., playing down the accomplishments of female versus male athletes). Two students shared intervening with the same male teacher regarding the same incident, in which the teacher, reading an excerpt from a book written by James Baldwin, "said the n-word with a hard -er at the end, thinking […] the word had no implications because he was reading it."

Six athletes stated they had role modeled an AAL-related value or behavior. These examples included demonstrating empathy for others' experiences ("I tell people, you never know what someone's going through, you never know how they're feeling") to affirming gender equity ("encouraging both female and male athletes to be more open and accepting of each other").

4. Barriers and facilitators

Participants identified barriers and facilitators to their embodying Athletes As Leaders' messaging via these methods. Participants shared that they actively weigh the challenges of intervening with their own feelings of preparedness to act and the benefits thereof.

4a. Barriers to dissemination

Barriers are factors which pose challenges athletes must overcome in order to act in a situation they deem negative. The barriers identified by these participants include lack of skills

and knowledge, lack of support or being 'the only,' personal characteristics or identities, relationships with those involved, and social stigma (see Table 5). Some identified themselves as able to overcome these hurdles; some did not.

Table 5. Participants' identified barriers to dissemination

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Lack of skills, knowledge		•	•					•	•	•
Being "the only"					•	•				
Personal characteristics, identities				•		•	•			•
Relationships with those involved					•			•		
Social stigma	•		•				•	•	•	•

Five athletes said they did or might feel hesitant to intervene if they thought they lacked skills or knowledge to effectively do so. One said, "I try not to talk too much if I don't have coverage, or I try to learn the subject before I give an opinion about it." Acting, another said, "takes a lot of courage" and knowledge not only *that* something is inappropriate or wrong, but *why* it is: "a lot of times people think […] I don't know if I know enough to say it. Like, even if it's wrong, […] how do I justify it's wrong? And it's like all these other things in your head, and you're just like, okay whatever. It's, like, better that I don't … it's easier not to say something."

Additionally, bearing solo responsibility for speaking up – and dealing with potential disagreement or backlash alone – represented a barrier: lack of support or being 'the only' was cited by two participants. One said, "it's harder to be the only person in your social group" standing up for these beliefs or intervening. Another said, "if you're the one person of color, or the one anything, you're gonna feel less open and less welcome to say something […because] no one else would understand."

Four participants cited personal characteristics and identities as possible barriers. One personality trait mentioned was being shy: one athlete said she found "just talking in general

[…], just speaking up" difficult because of her shyness. In addition to race, as discussed above, age was cited by two participants. One said, "you feel like you're not old enough to be doing all this. You know, especially for example if you see an adult doing something wrong, you're like, oh I can't say nothing, that's an adult, you know? I have to stay in my place." Another said a reason she hadn't intervened in a problematic situation was because the perpetrator was "an upperclassman, and like, I don't feel comfortable putting myself in that position if I don't know them."

As that quotation also notes, relationships with those involved could function as barriers. Athletes indicated both not knowing the perpetrator and a close relationship with a perpetrator could diminish their willingness to intervene. For example, one said, "I can see someone who's like, friends with that person, almost worried – not wanting to ruin that by saying something." On the other hand, another indicated she was *more* hesitant to speak up around strangers: "someone I don't know as well could take it the wrong way or differently. It's definitely about vibes." Athletes' anticipated responses to their interventions played into their decision to intervene or not. As one participant said, how the perpetrator receives the intervention "influences whether your voice matters or whether you're going to go [intervene] again." A potentially negative response – the "thought that someone else is going to disagree with you and you'll become the target" – might stop someone from saying anything at all. A student who felt more inclined to respond to a teacher than a peer said that was the case because "[saying something to a peer] really like, hurts them, and […] makes them more angry," thus making intervening useless or even damaging.

Key to relationships with those involved and their anticipated response was a larger fear of social stigma, a significant barrier identified by six participants. Most students were "trying to

still fit in, or not be embarrassed," goals which might be compromised by their speaking up. Another said simply, "you don't want to be uncool." Two found the potential stigma of intervening particularly harmful for women: "there is this […] idea that any woman who kinda stands up for, like, female empowerment and stuff like that is this radical feminist where she hates men, she just wants women to rule the world." Another agreed, saying girls might hesitate to intervene because of the desire not to be seen as "bossy or opinionated." Another found this stigma particularly virulent online, because "people are a lot bolder, they're not face-to-face, so they say things they wouldn't say to you, like, in real life." Two participants spoke about what they called "call-out culture," the act of drawing attention to or criticizing someone for saying or doing something deemed socially unjust or discriminatory. One said, "At [our high school] particularly, 'cause there's so many people who are social justice oriented, [that…] leads to call-out culture, which ostracizes people who don't have the exposure, don't have the resources to learn about those things, so that's kind of problematic." Rather than creating more supportive social environments, another similarly saw this as a potentially damaging dynamic: "something I really don't like about [our high school] is sometimes we have this […] call-out culture, where it's just so harsh. I'm like, just because you call out that person, it's just making them more scared and it's not fixing anything. And it's just so visible here, like, people will literally call you out in front of everyone." As these examples illustrate, athletes navigate complex social environments and relationships in their decisions about how and when to disseminate AAL content.

4b. Facilitators to dissemination

Facilitators helped athletes overcome these and other barriers in order to disseminate AAL messages. Both facilitators experienced by the participants and hypothetical ones which

might help them or others act were found. The facilitators identified include skills and experiences, personal characteristics, an imperative to act, relationships with those involved, and environmental factors (see Table 6).

Table 6. Participants' identified facilitators in dissemination

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Skills, experience	•		•	•	•			•	•	
Personal characteristics	•	•	•	•	•		•	•		•
Imperative	•	•		•		•		•		•
Relationships					•	•		•		
Environmental factors				•	•	•	•			•

Simply having past experience intervening was seen as helpful by six participants. One said, "I think it's just doing it, like, one time and then figuring out that, like, it's not that bad. And that's with a lot of things, just getting over that bump." Others who shared specific instances of intervening said most were received positively. The student who asked her peer to not spread a rumor about her ex-girlfriend said, "[my peer] didn't seem really defensive to me, which was nice because I kind of expected that. But she was pretty open to, like, talking about it." These athletes shared these positive experiences made them more likely to feel confident taking action again.

Others indicated a similar shift in their ability or willingness to speak up: one shared, "it took me a while to voice my opinion, I didn't always used to be that way, but something is kind of growing on me. […] I feel like I'm growing older and wiser." Two athletes said leadership positions helped them build confidence, which in turn helped them feel comfortable speaking up: "I probably wouldn't speak up if I didn't […] have the confidence that if I say something, like, [other people will] respect you." One benefit of this confidence was the ability to find creative ways to intervene which still felt authentic. Athletes mentioned experience and confidence

helped with "coming up with other ways to […] make it a joke, but also get your point across." Similarly, another said, "I think I've kind of found a balance, where I'm not like, yelling in people's faces about it, but I'm still making my point."

One example of a personality characteristic which served as a facilitator is confidence. Some participants identified their personalities as aligned with being interveners, for example saying, "I don't feel like it's hard. I feel like it's something easy to do. It doesn't take much." Some felt their outspoken nature helped: one said, "I've always been pretty open, like, trying to spread awareness," and another, "I do things without thinking sometimes, so sometimes that helps." Two athletes said growing up in male-dominated families had made them eager to prove their ability: for example, one said, "sometimes [my four older brothers] would be like, oh you can't do this, you're a girl. And I'd be like, yes I can."

Athletes indicated they often felt it was imperative to intervene: "if nobody else is gonna stand up, you know, somebody has to, or it's gonna continue… that's like a slippery slope right there." Another said, "if you know in your heart that it's not cool, that whatever happened is not right, then you gotta speak up about it." This imperative to act served as a facilitator in overcoming barriers to act, but differed by potential or perceived impact of the harmful action, as well as the target and perpetrator of the action. One athlete said she wouldn't intervene if it appeared the words weren't negatively impacting the person being targeted: if "they're laughing and making jokes back, there's really no reason to say anything."

Similarly, athletes frequently felt it important to act on behalf of marginalized populations, most notably women and people of color. A gymnast said, "being a non-black person has given me a lot of privilege, so, and […yet] as a person of color, I can still understand and experience racism, so being able to be kind of in the middle has given me the opportunity to,

like, when I notice one of my black peers is really uncomfortable by something that my white teacher has said, and nobody is saying anything, I'm usually that person to step up and say, like, that wasn't okay." A softball player focused on advocating for female athletes by "making sure that they're given the right amount of respect, especially from male athletes, who tend to […] degrade female athletes in some ways." In addition to acting on behalf of the target, athletes' decision intervene was often facilitated by the person perpetrating the negative act. This was specifically raised regarding teachers: much of this criticism focused on teachers' perceived inability to address diversity – specifically racial diversity – in a school with a racially diverse student population and comparatively homogenous teaching and administrative staff. One athlete said she felt compelled to act in situations where faculty attempt to "shed light on communities of color and try to make their curriculum intersectional but instead stomp all over it because they don't know how to handle it." Another participant said she was more likely to say something to a teacher specifically "because they are educated and they should know [better]." The extent of their imperative to act differed, however, by participant. For example, when confronted by a student, the teacher reading James Baldwin "apologized and everything, […] he was willing to learn." The second student who intervened in the same situation with this teacher said, "so I talked to him about it, and he was like, what should I say? And I was like, I don't know, not that. [laughter] And then I walked away. [laughter] I was like, that seems like your problem. [laughter] Like, just don't say it." In this quote, the athlete feels the need to correct the behavior, but not be burdened with the job of fully educating the teacher about how to behave differently in the future, a responsibility she sees as resting with the teacher himself.

Relatedly, relationships were also cited as facilitators. One said it might be "much easier and more powerful" to intervene in front of your friends, who might take it more seriously and

be more receptive. Another extended this to non-peer relationships, saying because she is "close to a lot of [her] teachers," she is more comfortable speaking up to them. Another referenced hierarchical relationships among groups as factors, too: "team captains and leaders of course have so much more power to say something and people will listen."

A common facilitator was a social environment that supported or endorsed the athlete's contemplated action. The school's reputation as a social justice-minded institution and population was cited as an encouragement to speak up, as was the team environment in which Athletes As Leaders was facilitated. One participant said, "a lot of people embrace the values [of AAL] a lot more when they're with the particular sports team that they learned about it with and connect it with," whereas they might be less likely to act when away from that team. Another stated not only is it easier to act with support, but actions might be more impactful that way: "there's obviously more power when you're with, like, a bunch of your team and someone says something. There'd be a much greater chance that someone would respond." Looking to larger contexts, two participants thought the overall environment and social climate of Seattle was influential: "sometimes living in Seattle, there's that kind of cloud, and we kinda forget that, you know, there's a lot more other people around." Another found current national events inspiring, particularly "the new Congresspeople right now, seeing representation [of more diverse people in government]."

DISCUSSION

This study explored female athletes' dissemination of Athletes As Leaders messages to non-athletic peers at a high school in Seattle, WA. Athletes cited positive feedback about the program and general agreement with the messages put forward in AAL, indicating a higher

likelihood of dissemination than if they didn't enjoy the program or agree with its messaging. The majority of participants were disseminating AAL messaging in some way, namely through three strategies: sharing content of AAL sessions in conversation with others, by role modeling behaviors and norms adherent with AAL, and by intervening in negative situations. In deciding when to disseminate, athletes identified numerous barriers (lack of skills or knowledge, being "the only," personality characteristics or identities, relationships with those involved, and social stigma) and facilitators (skills and experiences, personal characteristics, an imperative to act, relationships, and environmental factors).

Although the purpose of this study was to explore dissemination of AAL messages beyond participants themselves, the athletes interviewed here frequently noted the value of the program for themselves, consistent with previous internal evaluations of the program (Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 2015; Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 2016; Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 2017; Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 2018a; Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 2018b). While community-wide change demands farther reach of these messages to truly prevent violence on a societal scale, the changes in mindset and behavior referenced by interviewees indicate participants draw both immediate and longer-term benefit from the program. Participants also consistently articulated a wish to see AAL offered to more of their non-athlete peers.

This individual benefit may make participants more likely to share AAL messaging via dissemination. To do so, athletes must conceive of themselves as appropriate and able messengers. Interviewees were mixed in their assessment of whether athletes, a heterogeneous group, were universally influential as messengers in a social diffusion model; this is consistent

with existing literature discussed above, which similarly questions this universality. Athletes raised a number of potentially mitigating factors. The school's social and historical emphasis on progressive causes, coupled with the decentralized, often segregated nature of the student body, influenced the emergence of social norms and, in turn, who participants viewed as having an impact on that emergence. The school's history of social justice activism and identity as a progressive school meant, to some participants, those were the accepted social norms of the school, shaping other norms and who might be seen as an influencer.

Additionally, this study found female athletes may perceive being influencers differently than male athletes. Although many agreed athletes in general were influential, male athletes, especially those playing popular sports like basketball and football, were seen as being more influential. Despite the high school's student body being 52% female, only 40% of all student athletes are on girls' teams; while 26% of the student body are male athletes, only 18% of the student body are female athletes (Seattle Public Schools, 2018c; C. Lynch, personal communication, May 2019). This smaller population of female athletes may reinforce their own perception of diminished influence, especially in the face of male overrepresentation in athletics. Additionally, female athletes face challenges unique to being female, a marginalized group. For example, being seen as bossy or opinionated, descriptors commonly attributed to outspoken females but not outspoken males, was cited as a barrier in this study. Female athletes may also downplay (intentionally or otherwise) their influence or leadership, traits commonly valued in men but not women, as documented in multiple arenas, including classrooms (Francis, 2000), professional workplaces (Martin and Phillips, 2017), and politics (Jalalzai and Krook, 2010). In this study, although the majority of athletes were disseminating, many expressed surprise at the idea of being influential within their social circles, and athletes repeatedly suggested others

might be *more* influential – including older students, athletes on other teams, or male-identified athletes or non-athletes alike.

Despite this gendered environment, the majority of the study participants were actively disseminating AAL-related messages. In doing so, participants repeatedly implied they actively navigate a complex matrix of personal characteristics and social environments as they decide how to disseminate, especially when contemplating role modeling and intervention. Implicit in their discussion of barriers and facilitators were goals for intervening and value statements about what makes intervention worthwhile, when, and for whom. As discussed, athletes were generally motivated to protect or defend the target of a negative situation, especially when they perceived the target to be less able to defend themselves because of a marginalized identity. This may be connected to female athletes' own identities as part of marginalized groups, including women, people of color, and others. Previous research demonstrates those with strong convictions of feminism (Leaper and Arias, 2011; Hyers, 2007) or who have participated in women studies coursework (Stake and Hoffmann, 2001) are more likely to intervene in instances of sexism; therefore those with strong adherence to AAL messages may be more motivated to intervene in instances that challenge those messages.

Navigating these situations while attending to their own social status posed a difficult challenge for athletes, however: participants were not only focused on the safety of others, but of themselves as well. Contrary to the above, Brinkman et al (2015) found women to be less likely to intervene *because* they hold marginalized identities themselves. In deciding if and how to intervene, participants therefore considered their own intersectional identities and the costs and benefits to them, not just the target; previous research on bystander intervention documents similar internal negotiations (see Hyers 2007; Kaiser and Miller 2004; Good et al, 2012).

One important factor helping female athletes overcome these gendered expectations and feel more confident as influencers was previous experience with leading or influencing peers, such as holding a formal leadership position within athletics or elsewhere at school. Participation in leadership development courses or programs was also found to be helpful. A common barrier to dissemination was lack of skills or experience, and a facilitator was the inverse; another barrier was fear of social stigma, and a facilitator, personality characteristics like confidence. These couplings indicate building female athletes' confidence and belief in their own ability to lead and influence is an important way to remove barriers and bolster facilitators, thereby empowering more female-identified youth to disseminate these messages among their peers. Additionally, the barriers and facilitators identified here are not unique to Athletes As Leaders dissemination or sexual violence prevention, but are applicable to a variety of other social problems, including bullying (Thornberg and Jungert, 2013; Evans and Smokowski, 2015), drug and alcohol use (Krieger et al, 2017; Reed and Rountree, 1997), and suicide (Olson et al, 2016). Therefore, AAL has power to not only influence social norms around healthy relationships and violence, per the curriculum, but also, through empowering the leadership of young women to speak up and take action in their communities, on other issues identified by the women as important. These athletes' confidence and leadership skills can carry over to other areas of their lives, a lasting impact of AAL participation.

The extent of dissemination varied widely among those doing so, with some seemingly engaged in multiple dissemination strategies across many areas of their lives and others citing only one incident of dissemination. While athletes struggled at times to articulate specifically how they may be disseminating AAL messaging, their responses imply norms are shifting and malleable, and that athletes – as well as other students – can shape norms through their actions

and words. This variety in dissemination strategies, frequency, and extent has implications for the overall impact of such a process on the social norms within the school. On one hand, athletes are free to disseminate in ways that feel appropriate to them, their identities, the barriers they experience, and the physical, social, and cultural environments in which they operate. This freedom might result in *more* dissemination because of this flexibility and adaptability. Athletes indicated a major facilitator was previous (and positive) experience with dissemination: if dissemination can take many forms, some of which are easy to accomplish, athletes may successfully use low-barrier methods to build confidence, thereby allowing them to disseminate in more challenging, public, or diverse ways in the future. On the other hand, this variety of dissemination strategies may mean those on the receiving end of such dissemination may not be fully aware of the messages athletes are sending. For example, are others aware when an athlete is role modeling being less judgmental? Further research is needed to understand the extent to which non-program participants are hearing AAL messages, understanding them, and taking them up. While this type of social network analysis is growing, a systematic review by Shelton et al (2019) indicates it largely focuses on dissemination and implementation, rather than adoption by others or sustainability of disseminated and implemented health promotion strategies. Further research should also explore whether female and male athletes use different dissemination strategies because of their different social positioning and privilege, and whether that impacts the ways their non-athletes peers receive and follow those messages.

Limitations

This study is subject to some limitations, most notably generalizability, variable internal consistency on preexisting measures used, and social desirability bias. The high school's unique environment and history of progressive activism may impact attempts to translate this program to

a new setting. This school has a long and well-known history of progressive activism by both staff and students and the student body seems generally well informed about and engaged in issues of social justice and equity, as evidenced by participation in protests, walk-outs, and other means of social engagement. When compared to other school environments, this school may be an easier environment in which to disseminate AAL messaging, as students may be predisposed to agree with such messages and more empowered to spread them to other peers. As such, AAL dissemination may be more challenging in other environments, and the experiences of athletes elsewhere may be different.

Items on the written questionnaire were extracted from validated measures measuring gender stereotyping, self-concept, empathy, and collective efficacy. The internal consistency of these measures varies (see Appendix C), with some measures reflecting strong consistency (>0.8) and others reflecting low consistency (<0.6). These measures were selected because of their relevance in the Athletes As Leaders conceptual model, and in the absence of more consistent measures of the same construct. Further research on characteristics of disseminators should use more rigorously evaluated and consistent measures of these constructs.

Additionally, interviewees may have experienced social desirability bias given the sensitivity of these topics and the fact that several were interviewed by the researcher, who had also served as their Athletes As Leaders facilitator. Participants may have felt pressure to overestimate their history with taking action or future inclination to intervene. However, contrary to this, several athletes stated they had not taken action, changed their beliefs, or otherwise been impacted by AAL, indicating they felt comfortable sharing honestly with the interviewer. Regarding the relationship with the interviewer, due to resources constraints, it was impossible to recruit and train additional interviewers to speak with athletes known to the researcher. In hopes

of mitigating this, the researcher prefaced each interview with language encouraging open and honest feedback and reiterating the importance thereof in making improvements to the program.

Conclusions

This study provides several directions for further research, as well as potential amendments to the Athletes As Leaders program to bolster effectiveness in achieving its goals. Further research explicitly exploring the impact of gender on leadership of student athletes, particularly when involved in social norms change, is needed. Given the gender dynamics emergent in this study, particularly around ideas of influence, future research should specifically explore this concept with female athletes to elicit a more nuanced understanding of how it is perceived. Subsequent comparison of dissemination strategies and success thereof among athletes of all genders is also needed.

This study also suggests several potential changes to the Athletes As Leaders program. One such idea stems from the articulation that past experience intervening helped athletes intervene in the future: by repeatedly speaking up, it was made easier in the future. AAL could, in the future, focus on working practice with dissemination (e.g. bystander intervention, social media messaging) into the sessions so as to help demystify the experience for participants. Further, while AAL does specifically explore actions participants can take via the "Team Talk" held at the end of each session, more explicit discussion of the full range of dissemination strategies, especially low-barrier methods, might invite more dissemination by more athletes. Additionally, multiple participants cited external leadership experiences as beneficial in bolstering their confidence; additionally, many suggested having youth facilitators deliver AAL content, rather than external adults. By doing so, athletes could gain leadership experience which

could translate to them being more confident, and thus more likely to intervene, in non-AAL settings.

Additionally, the need for a gender-inclusive version of the program is clear. All athletes could benefit from discussing this important information in an all-gender environment, where they can hear and learn from the perspectives and experiences of those of different genders than their own. Additionally, this setting could provide a powerful opportunity for allyship across genders, which could both deepen empathy among athletes and assist in creating a more supportive team and school environment for disseminating and embodying these values.

A key finding was the importance of social networks, even in a large and somewhat divided school like the one studied here. Athletes repeatedly said speaking up was easier with support or around their team. This underscores the need to ensure more students receive information like that shared in AAL, so as to increase the likelihood of students finding themselves in groups and environments conducive to productive intervention. Given the number of students who spoke about negative experiences with adults, especially teachers, it is important to remember the overall connected nature of our social networks, and to target all demographics, not just young people, for education and prevention work.

As the field of violence prevention moves from focusing on individual behavior change and increasingly emphasizes community-level change, using strategies like social diffusion to reach more people more effectively is essential. Understanding who among such networks is most influential and how to best support their influence will ensure the efficiency and impact of prevention and education work in the future. And leveraging the voices of those who have not traditionally been seen as leaders – including young women – ensures more equitable prevention

strategies and longer-lasting social change. This study found young women ready to do this work, already doing this work, and eager to engage in it more deeply.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Athletes As Leaders Curriculum Overview

Week	Session Topic	Objectives
1	Introductions & Group Agreements	- Introduce athletes to Athletes As Leaders program and goals - Generate group agreements regarding how athletes will interact and behave during AAL sessions
2	Challenging Gender Stereotypes	- Identify gender stereotypes and expectations affecting women and girls and how they impact our lives - Identify ways to positively challenge gender stereotypes and promote female empowerment
3	Privilege & Oppression	- Introduce concept of systems of privilege and oppression and how these concepts affect us - Identify ways to challenge oppression and practice compassion for all people
4	Self-Image & Standards of Beauty	- Discuss how gender stereotypes about physical appearance particularly impact women and girls - Generate ways to challenge traditional messages about beauty and promote positive self-image for all women and girls
5	Rumor Spreading	- Discuss the ways spreading rumors, especially about sexual and other personal matters, is harmful to healthy communication and relationships - Brainstorm ways to stop harmful rumors from spreading
6	Relationships	- Identify healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors - Identify ways to promote healthy relationships and support those in unhealthy relationships - Identify school and community resources for support
7	Consent	- Define consent - Identify situations where consent is necessary and ways to ask and listen for consent - Identify school and community resources for support
8	Messages about Manhood	- Discuss gender stereotypes and expectations affecting men and boys - Identify ways these stereotypes impact women and girls, and relationships among the genders - Identify ways to challenge stereotypes about men and boys
9	Girl Positivity	- Discuss ways women are often positioned to not support one another - Identify examples of women supporting one another - Identify ways to promote and practice girl positivity at school and in community
10	Celebrating our Successes	- Celebrate success of the group - Practice girl positivity via recognition circle

Appendix B. Questionnaire

[3]

2019 EVALUATION
ATHLETE QUESTIONNAIRE

How do you identify your…

1. Gender?

_____

2. Race/Ethnicity?

_____

What is your…

3. Birth month & year?

_____

4. Grade level now?

_____

5. When did you FIRST participate in SLAY?

_____

6. When did you LAST participate?

_____

7. How many seasons have you participated in SLAY?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ Other: ___

8. What sports have you done at your school?

☐ Cross country ☐ Golf ☐ Soccer ☐ Swimming/Diving
☐ Volleyball ☐ Cheer ☐ Basketball ☐ Gymnastics
☐ Wrestling ☐ Softball ☐ Tennis ☐ Track & Field

9. What sports have you done SLAY with?

☐ Cross country ☐ Golf ☐ Soccer ☐ Swimming/Diving
☐ Volleyball ☐ Cheer ☐ Basketball ☐ Gymnastics
☐ Wrestling ☐ Softball ☐ Tennis ☐ Track & Field

Have you held a formal leadership position…

10. on your sports team (like team captain)? ☐ yes ☐ no

11. through another activity your school (like ASB, club leader, etc)? ☐ yes ☐ no

[3] Athletes As Leaders was originally implemented at this high school under the name Student Leaders and Athletic Youth (SLAY). While now called AAL formally and at subsequent implementation sites, at this school it continues to be called SLAY. The content across both programs is identical.

The questions below ask about how you see yourself in relation to the people around you in your community.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. On a date, a boy should be expected to pay all expenses.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
2. On the average, girls are as smart as boys.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
3. It is all right for a girl to want to play rough sports like football.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
4. It is all right for a girl to ask someone out on a date.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
5. If both husband and wife have jobs, the husband should do a share of the housework such as washing dishes and doing the laundry.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
6. Boys are better leaders than girls.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
7. I like the way I act.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
8. People usually like me.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
9. I can be trusted.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
10. I can do most things I try.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
11. I will always have friends.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
12. I get along well with other people.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
13. It is hard for me to make friends.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
14. My friends respect me.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
15. I often feel lonely.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
16. I can listen to others.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
17. People I don't like can have good ideas.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
18. I get upset when my friends are sad.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
19. I am sensitive to other people's feelings, even if they are not my friends.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
20. People at my school are willing to help each other.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
21. My school is generally a safe and welcoming school for students.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
22. People in my school can be trusted.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
23. People in my school generally don't get along with each other.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5
24. People in my school do not share the same values.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5

Appendix C. Validated measures used in questionnaire
See Appendix B for questionnaire.

Survey Item	Mean	Measure & source	Internal consistency
1. On a date, a boy should be expected to pay all expenses.*	3.6	Gender Stereotyping: Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Galambos et al, 1985)	.62-.86
2. On the average, girls are as smart as boys.	3.5		
3. It is all right for a girl to want to play rough sports like football.	4.8		
4. It is all right for a girl to ask someone out on a date.	4.8		
5. If both husband and wife have jobs, the husband should do a share of the housework such as washing dishes and doing the laundry.	4.6		
6. Boys are better leaders than girls.*	4.7		
7. I like the way I act.	4.4	Self-concept: Individual Protective Factors Index (Phillips & Springer, 1992)	58-.59
8. People usually like me.	3.9		
9. I can be trusted.	4.5		
10. I can do most things I try.	4.5		
11. I will always have friends.	4.0		
12. I get along well with other people.	4.2		
13. It is hard for me to make friends.*	3.7		
14. My friends respect me.	4.4		
15. I often feel lonely.*	3.9		
16. I can listen to others.	4.6	Empathy: Teen Conflict Survey (Bosworth & Espelage, 1995)	.62
17. People I don't like can have good ideas.	4.2		
18. I get upset when my friends are sad.	3.8		
19. I am sensitive to other people's feelings, even if they are not my friends.	3.8		
20. People at my school are willing to help each other.	3.3		
21. My school is generally a safe and welcoming school for students.	3.2	Collective/community efficacy: Chicago Neighborhood Study (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997)	.80-.91
22. People in my school can be trusted.	2.9		
23. People in my school generally don't get along with each other.*	3.5		
24. People in my school do not share the same values.*	2.8		

* Reverse coded (5= strong disagreement, 1=strong agreement)

Appendix D. Interview Guide

Consent

- Introduction to me & thank you for being willing to participate
- Issue consent form & review major items:
    - Privacy/confidentiality: name won't be recorded on your questionnaire, interview; we won't mention you by name in anything we write or share about this evaluation
    - Voluntary
    - Can opt out at any time:
        - Opt out of any question; we'll just move to next question
        - Opt out of the whole thing: any info collected up to that point will be deleted/destroyed, and consent forms returned to you
    - I'll ask you again at the end of the interview if you are still okay with your information being part of our evaluation.
- Audio recording
    - Do you/do you not give consent to have the interview portion recorded? If yes:
        - No video, just audio
        - Will be transcribed
        - Recording will be destroyed after 6 months
- Questions about anything on the form before signing it?
- Questions or concerns before we start?

Interview

Let me tell you a little more about our goals for this evaluation. By talking to athletes like you, we're hoping to learn what's going well in the program and what we might improve. In SLAY,[4] we talk about how athletes can be leaders in changing behavior and attitudes in their school, and we're curious to know if that is happening, and how you may be sharing the messages of SLAY at [high school] or somewhere else. In order for us to improve the program for the future, it's really important you be as honest as you possibly can with me. You know best. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Also, as we discussed, I will/will not be audio-record the interview with your permission. I may also take notes during our conversation. Do you have any questions before we start?

1. When did you first participate in SLAY and with what team?

[4] Athletes As Leaders was originally implemented at this high school under the name Student Leaders and Athletic Youth (SLAY). While now called AAL formally and at subsequent implementation sites, at this school it continues to be called SLAY. The content across both programs is identical.

2. What was your favorite part about SLAY? And what was your least favorite thing about the program?

3. Since you first were part of SLAY, have your thoughts about topics we talk about in SLAY – like gender, healthy relationships, consent, how women are "supposed to" act – changed?
    a. Tell me a little more about those changes.
    b. *If no changes:* tell me more about why you don't think your thoughts or beliefs have changed.

4. Do you think athletes at [your high school] are seen as role models and leaders? Why or why not?
    a. *Probes:* How are athletes seen by other students? What kind of social influence do you think they have on other students?
    b. Do you think *you* are an athlete with that kind of social influence? Why or why not?
    c. What kinds of people at [your high school] are "cool kids" with social influence?

5. Part of SLAY is coming up with the SLAY Standard, at the end of each session, which is about how athletes can show respect and support toward others, and create a better school environment. Can you remember a certain standard or norm that your team decided to do?
    a. *If yes:* And have you done that behavior/activity/etc? Can you give me an example?
    b. *If no:* Did you team come up with those standards and you can't remember, or did your team not do that part of the session?

6. After any of the SLAY discussions, did you change your behavior at all, like in the way you treated someone?
    a. How? Walk me through the experience. How did you feel after that experience?
    b. What was the other person's/peoples' response?

7. After any of the SLAY discussions, did you ever speak up when you noticed something that wasn't right, or someone treating someone else badly? (either in person or on social media)
    a. How? Walk me through the experience. How did you feel after that experience?
    b. What was the other person's/peoples' response? (ex: were they into it or not?)

8. After any of the SLAY discussions, did you ever share those messages or content with someone not on your team? (For example, did you ever tell a friend or someone else

something you talked about during SLAY? Or posted something on social media or intervened in a conversation because of something you talked about in SLAY?)

a. How? Walk me through the experience. How did you feel after that experience?
b. What was the other person's/peoples' response? (ex: were they into it or not?)

9. What might be hard or prevent you from sharing messages you learned in SLAY, intervening if you see something going on, or maybe changing your behavior even if you want to?
    a. *Probes:* do you think about social/peer pressure, not feeling you have skills to intervene, not sure what to do, fear for your own safety

10. *If disseminator:* Do you think something specific about SLAY helped you feel ready to share those messages or change your behavior? *If non-disseminator:* Do you think we could have changed SLAY in some way to help you feel more ready to or interested in share those messages?
    a. *Probes:* your facilitator was really good or not; you really liked the videos or activities; your team came up with really concrete ideas about what you could do; etc.

11. And what about other things, like personal characteristics, that helped you share/take action [OR] prevented you from sharing SLAY messages/taking action? For example, you feel confident sharing your beliefs with others [OR] you feel people don't really listen to you.

12. One of our goals is to create a SLAY 2.0 that is more advanced and more gender-inclusive. What would you want included in a SLAY 2.0?
    a. *Probes:* What topics do you think we should cover? What topics do you think we shouldn't cover? Would you like more activities, different videos?
    b. What other changes would you recommend for SLAY 2.0?
    c. Would you be interested in helping us create SLAY 2.0 or content to be included?

13. Is there anything else you want to share, or anything I haven't asked about that you think is important we know?

Finally, are you still willing to have your information be included in our evaluation?

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