



The kiss

Will the infamous Rubiales kiss prove to be a watershed moment for women's sport — and beyond? **Joan Garrod** investigates

On 20 August 2023, the Spanish women's football team won the World Cup, beating England 1-0. The finals were watched by millions, providing further evidence of the growing interest in women's sport generally and football in particular. However, Spain's achievement on the pitch was rapidly overshadowed by subsequent events. In the post-match celebrations, the team lined up to be congratulated by the president of the Spanish Football Association, Luis Rubiales.

As global news media filmed the celebrations, Rubiales was shown hugging members of the Spain team, and kissing them on the cheek. However, when player Jenni Hermosa reached him, he held her head in both hands and kissed her on the lips. This action caused shock and widespread criticism around the

world, and calls for his resignation. A defiant Rubiales initially refused to resign, saying that the kiss was 'mutual and consensual.' Hermosa contested this, saying that it was neither, and later filed a complaint against him for 'sexual assault and coercion.'

Consent

Spain had recently reformed its laws on sexual consent, after a notorious case in 2016 in which five men were acquitted of gang-rape. Under the so-called 'Only Yes is Yes' law, a non-consensual kiss can be considered an offence of sexual assault. If the case goes to trial, and Rubiales was found guilty, he could face a fine or up to 4 years imprisonment. While a High Court judge considers the evidence, he has banned Rubiales from going within 200 metres of Hermosa, and from contacting her. Rubiales has since resigned, saying he can no longer do his work, but has denied the charges against him.

Evidence of sexual harassment and the abuse of power has emerged in a variety of women's sports,



Recently, the experiences of female surgeons have become part of the wider conversation about workplace harassment and abuse

including athletics, gymnastics and wrestling. There is also a much wider debate about similar abuses in a variety of workplace settings, including the NHS, the police, the fire service and the media.

What issues does this raise?

- **Inequalities of power:** abuse is more likely to occur when abusers are in a position of power over the abused, e.g. their boss, manager or coach. Women are often the unequal partner in power relationships.
- **Organisation failure:** women are often afraid to report abuses to superiors or governing bodies, and when they do, there is often a failure to respond appropriately, with complaints being dismissed, ignored or incidents of 'victim blaming'.
- **Effects on health:** the shame arising from abuse can lead to stress, loss of self-esteem and even withdrawing from a sport.

Questions and activities

- 1 Read the *Guardian* article about the experiences of female surgeons:
www.tinyurl.com/pbyme8sa
- 2 Watch the YouTube clip of the *DW* news bulletin reporting on the Rubiales issue — note that it took place before Rubiales resigned:
www.tinyurl.com/yc7arub7
- 3 Have a group discussion on whether a non-consensual kiss should be considered as sexual assault.
- 4 Exam-style question, either a homework essay or timed answer:
'Assess the view that, despite some changes in attitude, women in sport and in the workplace are still subject to patriarchy and the abuse of power.'

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