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Examining the Influence of Gender on Athletes' Levels of Moral Reasoning: A Comparison of Intercollegiate Athletes and Students

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The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of gender on levels of moral reasoning for intercollegiate athletes and college students. Moral reasoning for this research was defined through the insight and application of Kohlberg's (1969) moral development theory. The sport specific measurement instrument utilized for this study was grounded in Kant's (1968) deontological ethical framework, focusing on moral reasoning from an obligation perspective. Research questions were formulated to compare the levels of moral reasoning among intercollegiate athletes and college students on the gender variable. Study participants (N= 213) from a large, Midwestern university were administered the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory (HBVCI), consisting of moral dilemma items common to sport (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS, 2009). The results of this study indicated that female athletes morally reason at a higher level than male athletes, and that collegiate students who are non-athletes morally reason at a higher level than college athletes. Additionally, the data revealed that there was no significant interaction between gender and athlete status.*

Sport is so ubiquitous in American culture today that much of what occurs in its context is dissected by millions of people eager to comment on observable behaviors by athletes, coaches, and fans. Eitzen and Sage (2009) went so far as to say that sport plays an important role in imparting significant values on both those that participate, as well as on those that follow. Although debatable exactly which ethics are imparted through sport, scholars believe that many values found in the sporting arena can be thought of as either positive or negative in nature, such as prioritizing sportsmanship and fair play in youth sports or over emphasizing the corporate aspect of collegiate and professional sport (Simon, Torres, & Hager, 2014). To this end, Simon et al. think that most people's adoption of a relativistic attitude leads to a general rejection of ethical and moral discourse in much of the Western world today, especially as it pertains to discussing behavior that might be perceived as unethical. Furthermore, Simon (2013) reported on data collected from college athletes that indicated less than 50% of men's and women's basketball players surveyed believe their coaches "define success by not only winning, but winning fairly" (p. 11). This is especially problematic since coaches often have the greatest influence on imparting the values Eitzen and Sage (2009) believe are being simultaneously taught and eroded in sport today. Other sport scholars have also noted that ethical coaching leadership is essential because athletes themselves not only learn to imitate behavior from their role model coaches, but also potentially develop sound ethical principles that govern all aspects of the athletes' lives (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Burton & Peachey, 2014; Roby, 2014).

When considering some of the other recent ethical issues in popular sport, such as the various allegations against the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) regarding match fixing in the lead up to World Cup and reports that thousands of workers will die in the process of building infrastructure for the 2022 Qatar event, it is apparent that some behaviors lack sound moral judgment (Morris, 2012). Also, when analyzing the ethical dimensions and implications for recent in contest equipment altering as a form of cheating (i.e., "Deflate Gate" in the 2014 NFL Playoffs), some players, coaches, and fans might conclude that although deflating footballs is an illegal act, it is accepted normative behavior that according to scholars might be "ignored or punished minimally" (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010, p.126). These ethical concerns regarding FIFA and the NFL are just a few of the headline grabbing issues present in popular sport today that present questions about the process of moral reasoning for virtual everyone involved in producing and consuming sport. But, instead of simply forgoing inquiry into the moral and ethical character of sport out of fear of relativistic exclusion from rationality, this research proposed an analysis into the process of moral reasoning by athletes.

This type of moral reasoning analysis is necessary as a means for potentially predicting unethical behavior in the future (University of Idaho Center for ETHICS*, 2009), as the thought processes and motivations of athletes are illuminated through a careful quantitative research design. Therefore, this study is important as a means for illuminating levels of moral reasoning among collegiate athletes and students, including factors such as gender that influence this process. Measured gender differences in levels of moral reasoning have consistently been found in sport specific research in a variety of contexts (University of Idaho Center for ETHICS*, 2009), as well as in fields such as accounting (Ariail, Abdolmohammadi, & Smith, 2012; Bernardi & Arnold, 1997; Shaub, 1994), physical therapy (Swisher, 2010), law (White & Manolis, 1997) and teenage volunteerism (Goethem, van Hoff, van Aken, Raaijmakers, Boom & de Castro, 2012). Scholars have also noted that it is important to understand that men and

women sometimes use a different primary lens for moral reasoning, such as a “care” ethic for females and a more ego centered ethic for males (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010; Gilligan, 1982). This type of gender difference might find females orientating themselves in an ethic of care for others (i.e., balancing and protecting relationships with others), while men are positioning themselves to do what is personally best for them. Ultimately, the results of this study can be used by sport administrators, educators, and coaches to develop and implement curriculum that can improve not only levels of moral reasoning, but also a stronger knowledge and sense of ethical behavior.

Review of Literature

DeSensi and Rosenberg (2010) defined morality as a “set of authoritative ideals that guide behavior” and as such, they believe that morality is “concerned with others’ well-being” (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010, p. 37). Hence, any definition for morality must include a social component related to behavior that is in line with the established norms of behavior rooted in any particular culture (Bandura, 1991). Therefore, it is important to note that conversations involving morality in sport must take into consideration cultural and social norms and influences that are germane to those whose reasoning is in question.

The earliest scholarly definitions for moral reasoning originated during the first half of the 20th century in the field of psychology, as an extension of Piaget’s stages of cognitive and moral development in children (Piaget, 1965) and dealt with a child’s mental ability to know the difference between “right” and “wrong” once of a particular age. More recently, psychologists who study moral reasoning have become fascinated with trying to comprehend how children respond to moral dilemmas at various stages of their development, as famously outlined by Kohlberg (1969). The most fundamental difference, though, between Piaget’s and Kohlberg’s definitions of moral reasoning relate to whether or not a person passes through each cognitive moral development stage in a fixed linear order as suggested by Piaget or in a more fluid, non-continuous order as outlined by Kohlberg. Sport researchers Tod and Hodge (2001) utilized Kohlberg’s work in their own research within sport and have defined moral reasoning as “representing the cognitive process that an individual goes through in order to reach a moral decision based on her or his perceptions of reality” (p. 308).

Due to the inherent gender bias present in Piaget’s and Kohlberg’s articulation of moral reasoning theory (their collective seminal research only involved male participants), further scholarly work that considered the feminine moral development and reasoning perspective was necessary (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010). Another issue with Kohlberg’s moral development research involves his articulation of the possible different levels of moral reasoning for males and females, (i.e., women are not capable of reasoning at as high of a level as men). As a response to this noted gender bias, Gilligan (1982) penned the book, *In a Different Voice*, which outlined key differences between the moral reasoning of males and females. For instance, Gilligan (1982) noted that females tend to solve moral conflict by considering how different decisions would affect relationships with other people, especially trying not to harm anyone else. Additionally, as various scholars have pointed out (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010; Proios et. al, 2011; Wright, 1988), Gilligan also believed that women struggle with the conflict of balancing their responsibility to others with their own internal selfishness. Finally, Gilligan (1982) proposed that women naturally possess a morality of care that inherently governs their ethical reasoning and decision making.

Moral reasoning is further defined as a cognitively learned thought process that takes into consideration the effect of a person's past and present experiences, which include modeled behavior by influential others such as parents, peers, teachers, and clergy (Beller and Stoll, 1995) that are utilized in "reaching decisions that have moral implications" (Heilbrun & Georges, 1990, p. 183). To this end, Gibbs (2014) noted that parental approval and disappointment can be key factors that affect the moral reasoning and moral development of children in terms of young peoples' moral socialization. Of special importance, though, is how these modeled behaviors from significant others might lead to a finer appreciation for how one's actions and decisions possibly affect other people (Siegal & Francis, 1982).

Within the sport domain, scholars have also discussed the process of moral reasoning as a cognitive development process, whereby there is no "one infallible process to follow" in understanding a person's moral reasoning process (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010, p. 44). Sport ethics scholars Simon, Torres and Hager (2014) took it one step further in stating that although moral reasoning is useful as a tool to help determine the ethical value of an action or decision, a measurement of it must be impartial and able to identify the difference between poorly supported and well supported positions. Thus, in light of what sport scholars have discovered, the study of moral reasoning must begin with a clear indication of what types of sport situations involve moral considerations and what benchmarks should be followed by those engaged in sport.

Morality in Sport Research

The vast majority of extant literature related to moral issues in sport deals specifically with what Morgan (2007) called "the depressingly sorry moral state in which sports presently find themselves" (p. xi). As such, academic interest in the ethics of sport over the past 50 years- among other topics- has been concerned with articulating the various moral pitfalls in sport germane to concepts such as sportsmanship (Keating, 1964), fair play (Butcher & Schneider, 1998), winning (Dixon, 1999), intentional rules violations (Fraleigh, 2003), doping (Corlett, Brown & Kirkland, 2013; Hoberman, 1995; McNamee, 2012;), genetic enhancement (Culbertson, 2009; Tamburrini, 2002), gender and sexual equality (Francis, 1995; Tannsjo & Tamburrini, 2000), race/ethnicity (Crosset, Filo, & Berger, 2011; Harrison, 2013; Valentine, 1999), violence (Simon, Torres, & Hager 2014), exploitation of student-athletes (Corlett, 2013; Wertheimer, 1996), and disability rights of athletes (Mitten, 2010; Silvers & Wasserman, 1998). Within each one of these categories scholars have written about the various moral issues that exist at the participatory, leadership, and organizational levels. For example, Francis (1995) believed that Title IX and affirmative action at the collegiate level is a moral issue as long as schools have disproportionate representation of female athletes and sport programs, which includes non-biased selection criteria for females in coaching as well as athletic administration positions.

Beyond identifying and discussing various actions, behaviors, or decisions in sport as being ethical or unethical, scholars have been interested in the moral reasoning of athletes and coaches that appear to influence the actions, behavior, and/or decisions that are in question. In fact, a 2006 qualitative study by Long, Pantaleon, Bruant, and d'Arripe-Loneuville revealed that elite male teenage athletes regularly engage in moral disengagement (a term used by Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli in 1996) as they compete in sport, at least due in part to the ego-centered competitive sport context. Long et al. believed this was noteworthy because these athletes appeared to morally reason at a level suggesting a cognitive ability to distinguish

between actions that are “right” or “wrong.” These athletes know the difference between “right” and “wrong”, yet due to the competitive sport context they choose to suspend higher moral reasoning in the heat of competition. Although not necessarily focusing on just athletic coaches, Rudd, Mullane, and Stoll (2010) sought to better understand the moral judgments of sport managers by developing a unique moral reasoning instrument for these types of leaders. Rudd et. al’s case studies provide evidence that sport specific contexts and scenarios can influence the moral reasoning of sport managers, especially if the leader is familiar with the particular scenario presented to him or her.

Quantitative research into moral reasoning in sport has primarily been conducted the past several decades using a measurement instrument created by researchers at the University of Idaho Center for ETHICS* (2009). The Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory (HBVCI) was designed to assess moral reasoning in the sport domain by asking those being surveyed to respond to moral dilemmas common in sport. The HBVCI claims to be the only sport specific scale for measuring moral reasoning in scholarly circulation today (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009).

Deontological Ethics

The theoretical lens for this research was grounded in deontology, a word of Greek origin that literally translated means “duty” or “obligation” (Beauchamp, 1991). Deontology is an ethical position that was originally articulated by the 18th century philosopher Kant in his 1785 seminal work, “Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals” (Kant, 1959). He thought that the “right” or “wrong” of an action is based on obeying one’s duty (Kant, 1968), apart from the outcome or consequences of any particular action (Kant, 1959). Additionally, Kant espoused a “categorical imperative” for judging morality in which there are no “ifs, and, or buts”, but instead a universal perspective to always be held when considering the ethicality of an action (Hartman & DesJardins, 2011, p. 138). It appears as though a person can receive their ethical and moral duties and obligations from a variety of sources, including God/Higher Power, personal intuition, or rational logic (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010). Still others believe that certain moral duties and obligations such as parents protecting their children are to be obeyed because they are naturally to be followed (Beauchamp, 1991).

According to Noddings (2013), Kant’s deontological ethics is not particularly concerned about outcomes or motivations either. In her book, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Noddings discussed that Kantian morality should be viewed from the position of what ethical principal someone is following in their actions and behaviors, not related to the intent of the agent. She further suggests that Kant’s deontological ethical insistence on adhering to obligation and duty above all else might lead to ignoring or foregoing behaviors or actions that demonstrate a desire to care for or care about someone in genuine need. Although not the emphasis of her work, Noddings does note that there is indeed positive value in caring for or about someone out of a sense of perceived duty or obligation because some “good” is being done.

Scholars in sport today think that deontological ethics should be viewed from a normative position that recommends behaving in ways that honor one’s moral duty and responsibility, irrespective of the consequence of the noted behavior (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010; Holowchak, 2005). Since deontological ethics is inherently concerned with moral behavior (Morgan, 2007) based on following duties and obligations, Holowchak (2005) believed that any action in sport

that deprives a human of dignity or moral worth (internally or externally) ought to be reprehensible (i.e., treating competitors as you would want to be treated), specifically in terms of commitment to fair play and displays of good sportsmanship. Hence, in light of deontological ethical theory, there are expected and well-established moral standards related to fair play and sportsmanship that those who participate in sport ought to obey in any context (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010). Finally, DeSensi and Rosenberg (2010) noted that for strict deontologist, “one’s only duty is to adhere to” these cemented moral standards (p. 74). The scholars who created and established the HBVCI have pre-determined that honesty, responsibility, and justice ought to be obeyed as deontological moral standards in sport (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009). In their inaugural testing of the HBVCI instrument, Beller and Stoll (1995) discussed morality as demonstrated “common decency to others” that inherently involves acting in a “respectful, honest, and fair” manner in our interactions with others (p. 353). To this end, they noted that moral reasoning measurement instruments ought to focus on determining whether or not individuals know “the difference between honest and dishonest, fair or unfair, and respectful and disrespectful behavior” (p. 354).

Gender and Moral Reasoning

Numerous scholars think that the issue of gender in the measurement of moral reasoning is especially important to consider in any context, including sport (Bredemeier, 1992; Gill, 2002; Gilligan & Attinucci, 1988; Proios, Athanailidis, Wilinksa, Vasilias, & Unierzyski, 2011). An early sport study seeking to understand gender differences in moral reasoning stated that, “men and women do not use consistently different considerations when reasoning about the appropriate course of action in a competitive athletic encounter” (Crown & Heatherington, 1989, p. 286). The results of this 1989 study support what was found by Colby and Damon (1983) and Friedman, Robinson, and Friedman (1987) in other gender-focused moral reasoning sport studies. The only noticeable gender difference in any of the aforementioned sport studies seems to involve the element of “care” that exists in the non-HBVCI instrument that was used (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2010). Care in this sense of moral reasoning research has been discussed by DeSensi and Rosenberg (2010) as an indication of how women may “feel responsible for the maintenance of relationships” (p. 43), which is in contrast to the potentially impersonal nature that males use for moral reasoning. For instance, in the Crown and Heatherington (1989) study, both genders tested at about the same level of moral reasoning on items related to justice, but showed slight differences on care items within the instrument. Hence, according to some of the earliest literature in sport research, there may not be a significant difference in the overall levels of moral reasoning between competitive male and female athletes. Furthermore, the lack of significant difference between genders in overall levels of moral reasoning even appears to extend to athletic coaches and sport administrators (Gillentine, 1996; Malloy, 1991). It should be noted, though, that these earlier sport studies, which did not detect much difference in moral reasoning between genders, were research that did not use the HBVCI.

Outside of the sport specific context there exists a body of studies that have been conducted which consider the role of gender in moral reasoning. Often cited research by Gilligan (1977, 1982, & 1986) outlined significant differences in the levels of moral reasoning between males and females (Gilligan & Attinucci, 1988). The chief difference highlighted by these studies has to do with the approach or orientation to morality between men and women. Although this research indicated a noticeable gap between the levels of moral reasoning for

adolescent and adult males and females, more recent studies across the globe that have used her methods and ideas suggest otherwise (Comunian & Gielen, 1995; Khaled & Al-Rumaidhi, 2008; Kumru, 2012). In fact, these three cross-cultural studies revealed very little difference, if any, in the moral reasoning scores of the equal numbers of male and female adolescents and young adults who were surveyed in Italy, Kuwait, Spain, and Turkey. Therefore, current non-sport research studies do not seem to support Gilligan's well-documented conclusion that significant, measurable differences exist in moral reasoning between males and females.

Other important issues at stake in the research concerning the influence of gender on moral reasoning involves the content of the moral dilemmas that are presented to respondents via measuring instruments (Agerstrom, Moller, & Archer, 2006) and moral reasoning research comparing revenue generating sports to non-revenue generating sports (particularly in light of gender). Several scholars believe that people of each gender have preferences for particular types of dilemmas, and that this predisposition might influence moral reasoning more than cognitive ability (Walker, de Vries, & Trevethan, 1987). For instance, Skoe, Cumberland, Eisenberg, Hansen, and Perry (2002) thought that due to the socialization process women approach moral dilemmas from a relationship or care standpoint, while men approach the same dilemma from a justice perspective. Thus, moral dilemmas whose content appears to indicate or suggest a caring type of moral response might be interpreted differently by each gender. Agerstrom et al. (2006) summarized this notion by stating that, "the focus on long term relationships in the dilemma may have caused participants to think more about care and less about justice when resolving the conflict" (p. 1273). This leads to the conclusion that the development of measuring instruments for moral reasoning ought to make every effort to balance the type and the content of moral dilemma items. Similarly, in the sport specific context there have been numerous studies completed in both revenue producing and non-revenue producing sports that have found differences in levels of moral reasoning between males and females (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009). Therefore, beyond just investigating whether or not each gender approaches moral reasoning from a particular unique value perspective, it is necessary to further illuminate any actual differences in measured levels of moral reasoning.

Moral Reasoning Comparing Athletes and Non-Athletes

The study of moral reasoning in the sport domain has examined the relationship between sports participation and the moral erosion of high school and college athletes (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995; Stoll, 2013). This appears to be due in part to the often easily observable actions in popular sport that involve aggressive tendencies and potentially intentional injurious acts (Bredemeier, Weiss, Shields, & Cooper, 1987), including what might occur as the result of an intentional foul (Barnes, Goc Karp, Stoll & Gwebu, 2008). In order to more fully comprehend the relationship between sports participation and morality, scholars began to test athletes against non-athletes on levels of moral reasoning (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009). Kohlberg's methodological work in developmental moral reasoning that utilized moral dilemmas has been extensively employed via the extant measuring instruments that have been used to test athletes against non-athletes. A few of these original studies found that intercollegiate basketball players and other competitive athletes morally reason at a lower level than college students who are not athletes (Bredemeier & Shields, 1984; Hall, 1981). The results of these early studies, regardless of the instrument used, have been confirmed by the data from numerous other studies that compared moral reasoning among

populations of athletes and non-athletes at the high school and collegiate level (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009).

Before the HBVCI was developed in the late 1980s, sport scholars attempted to measure morality among athlete populations with Haskin's & Hartman's (1960) Action-Choice Test (ACT), Rest's (1979) Defining Issues Test (DIT), or Hall's (1981) Sport Questionnaire (SQ) (Webb, 2008). These measuring devices included items related to assessing demonstrated sportsmanship, fair play and character in sport. The findings from the administration of these earlier instruments indicated that youth involvement in sport is related to lower levels of moral reasoning (Hall, 1981). Furthermore, other conclusions were drawn from these studies that communicated an increase in moral reasoning with chronological maturity, yet a decrease in moral reasoning as sport participation increases (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986). On a positive note, Beller (1991) determined through the use of a pre-test and post-test (DIT & HBVCI) that was administered before and after a four+ month long course in "moral reasoning in sport", that athletes could be taught to morally reason at higher levels (Byl & Visker, 1999, pp. 272-273). Despite the insights that were gained from these studies, most of these early instruments proved to be insufficient measurement tools (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009) due to issues related to clearly defining key terms within the moral reasoning construct (Webb, 2008). As a result, scholars have since developed separate measurement tools for gauging character, fair play, and moral reasoning in the sport setting. In fact, Beller and Stoll's (1989) development of the HBVCI that was used in this study was born out of a perceived need for an instrument whose design was focused solely on measuring moral reasoning in the sport milieu.

Since its inception and inaugural use by Beller & Stoll, the HBVCI has been administered to more than 70,000 subjects in at least 45 published and unpublished sport studies (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009). Those assessed with the HBVCI include members of the United States military academies, as well as interscholastic and intercollegiate athlete populations. In general, these research studies utilizing the HBVCI have found the following results to be significant (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009, para 1-9):

1. Athlete populations score significantly lower on moral reasoning inventories than do non-athlete populations.
2. The competitive athletic environment is not typically a place where higher levels of moral reasoning occur.
3. Athletes become morally calloused from their competitive sport environment.
4. The longer males and females participate in competitive sport, especially team sport athletes, the lower their moral reasoning scores.
5. Female athlete moral reasoning scores are lowering about every three years.

Collectively these summarized findings from the data of many administrations of the HBVCI helped serve as the starting place in formulating the research questions that were stated for this study.

Although the HBVCI is grounded in the deontological moral perspective, the scholars responsible for maintaining the database of these bountiful research studies believe that lower

levels of moral reasoning and demonstrated moral behavior among athletes are likely the result of “limited consequences” (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009, para. 1). It is possible, then, that the summarized list of findings above might not be reflected among the same respondents if they were to be assessed with an instrument that determines moral reasoning based on consequences instead of duty and obligation. To this end, a consequences based ethical lens such as utilitarianism might be viewed as promoting moral behavior based on formulating rules- that when followed- often “lead to a greater amount of happiness” (DeSensi & Rosenburg, 2010, p. 71). Juxtaposed to this type of utilitarianistic point of view is the ethical lens of deontology that disregards judging behavior based solely on outcomes and instead judges behavior on whether or not someone is obeying “accepted and well-established moral standards” (DeSensi & Rosenburg, p. 74). Thus, future research on the topic of moral reasoning in sport should consider developing a measuring instrument that is theoretically grounded in consequential ethics.

Another posited explanation for behavioral differences between athletes and non-athletes involves the notion that athletes appear to engage in a type of contest moral reasoning that results in an athlete’s disengagement with normal day-to-day cognitive reasoning processes (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Scholars such as Tod and Hodge (2001) noted that this type of game reasoning might be associated with a strong ego task orientation, where athletes seek to attain superior levels of success within their sport. To this end, at least one study found that athletes with a strong ego disposition are more likely to attempt to intentional injury other athletes while competing (Duda et. al, 1991). Thus, for some athletes there appears to be the type of moral disengagement that was suggested by Bandura (1990), which noted eroded morality that can sometimes result in ego driven overly aggressive behavior toward others (especially if this type of behavior has been modeled before).

Purpose of the Study

This research was designed to explore and describe the level of moral reasoning present in the competitive sport context for a population of intercollegiate athletes and a population of non-intercollegiate athletes. To accomplish this intent, the following were specific purposes of this research: to describe and analyze levels of moral reasoning for intercollegiate athletes and their non-athlete peers; and to describe levels of moral reasoning present within each gender for collegiate athletes and college students who are not athletes. Therefore, the following research questions were proposed: 1. Is there a difference in levels of moral reasoning between each gender of athletes and non-athletes? 2. Do intercollegiate athletes morally reason at a level different than college students who are not athletes? 3. What are the interaction effects of gender (male or female) and athlete status (athlete versus non-athlete)? These variables were selected for analysis due to their use in previous research studies in sport.

Method

Sampling and Procedures

Survey instruments containing the HBVCI and self-reported demographic data (age, gender, year in school, race/ethnicity, and type of sport played) were distributed during sport industry major lecture classes and at evening meetings of Athletes in Action (AIA) to a total of

213 intercollegiate athletes and college students (i.e., non-intercollegiate athletes) at a large, Midwestern university. AIA is a 50-year-old student led faith-based organization that maintains chapters on college campuses all across the country. AIA holds regular meetings for current and former athletes (although technically anyone can attend) and their goal is to help people build relationships with Christ through the sport platform. AIA meetings were selected as a study invitation location due to the large number of student-athletes that often attend these on campus gatherings, and because of the attendees' accessibility to the researchers. Of the 213 questionnaires that were distributed, 2 were excluded from the final analysis due to missing items. Therefore, a final usable sample of 211 surveys was deemed suitable for use (Table 1). The 211 usable surveys were comprised of 148 male (70.1%) and 63 female (29.9%) respondents. The distribution of the sample included 106 (50.2%) intercollegiate athletes and 105 (49.8%) college students.

Table 1 - Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic Variable	Respondents (<i>n</i> =211)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	148	70.1
Female	62	29.4
No response	1	.5
Race		
Caucasian	166	78.7
African American	18	8.5
Bi-Racial	3	1.4
Hispanic	4	1.9
Asian	7	3.3
3 or more	1	.5
No response	11	5.2
Academic year in school		
1	12	5.8
2	46	22.2
3	74	35.7
4	71	34.3
5	4	1.9
No response	6	2.8
Athlete status		
Intercollegiate athlete	106	50.2
Student/non-athlete	105	49.8

Research Design and Instrument

For the present study, the internal validity of the instrument used has been established by previous published studies that reported a high level of internal consistency based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability (Cronbach, 1951) for moral reasoning. For example, the HBVCI was determined to have strong reliability and internal validity yielding Cronbach's alphas from .74 to .88 (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009). Further threats to internal validity were addressed by having one of the researchers hand deliver the surveys to study participants at AIA meetings and during regular academic classes in order to reduce the possibility that surveys were altered or biased by the participation of other researchers (Ary, 2010). The construct of moral reasoning was measured using the questionnaire that was distributed to the selected population for this study. Demographic information relative to each survey participant was gathered as well, including gender, ethnicity, age, year in college, and type of sport played.

The HBVCI measures cognitive moral reasoning of groups of people through the use of 16 items presented in the form of moral dilemmas (read by respondents as vignettes), which are common to sport. The instrument's moral dilemmas in sport items are geared toward measuring the deontological perspective of respondents, which focuses on moral knowing from a duties and obligation perspective of the person in question/moral agent (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009). After reading this dilemma respondents were asked on a 5-point Likert scale to choose an answer that best describes their feelings (SA- strongly agree to SD- strongly disagree). A respondent who selected "strongly agree" would be viewed according to deontological moral theory as someone who was forgoing their personal moral duty of being honest and just, which includes not casting individual responsibility onto others (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009). For instance, consider one of the HBVCI items- A soccer player uses his hand to control a chest high pass, but because the referee did not see the action (and it is the referees' job to make the call), the player is not obligated to report the foul. In this case, a respondent who selects "strongly agree" would be foregoing their moral duty to not cast their own responsibility onto others

As a means for interpreting the results of HBVCI moral dilemma responses, the scholars who designed the instrument (using insights from deontological moral theory) developed the following definitions for the words honesty, responsibility and justice (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009, para. 17):

1. Honesty is defined as the condition or capacity of being trustworthy or truthful. Honesty, in this sense, is a basic character that society espouses- an ideal of moral development...to be honest in thought, word, or deed. Honesty, therefore, is the code of conduct that takes into consideration lying, cheating, and stealing, and refers to the honest person as one who follows the rules and laws.
2. Responsibility is defined as accounting for one's actions in the past, present, and future. We are responsible for our acts, if, and only if, we did the act or caused it to occur. A responsible person is morally accountable and capable of rational conduct.
3. Justice is defined as an equity or fairness for treating peers or competitors equally. Justice is the quality of being righteous or of dealing justly with others. It is based in the integrity of doing the right or fair act.

Thus, the HBVCI is interested in measuring how respondents in the sport context regard moral issues and situations related to an individual's perception of personal honesty, responsibility, and justice. For this study, intercollegiate athletes and college students who are non-athletes moral reasoning was assessed based on the instrument's design that defines the construct of cognitive moral reasoning (knowing) in terms of deontological theoretical concepts encompassing honesty, responsibility, and trust (S. Stoll, personal communication, September 10, 2012).

To examine the validity of the measurement instrument being used in this study, a panel of four experts was consulted, per the recommendation from Ary et al. (2010), in order to make sure that the instruments are measuring what they report to measure. Specifically, face validity was established by the selected panel of experts as a means for determining appropriate use in the population being studied (Ary et al., 2010). The content validity of this measurement instrument was assessed by the same panel of four experts from the field of sport management.

Results

Respondents ranged from 18-34 years of age (83.7% were between the ages of 19-21) with a mean age of 21.08 years ($SD = 2.165$) and ranged in year in school from 1-5 (92.2% were in their 2nd-4th year in college) with a mean of 3.04 years in school ($SD = .936$).

Reliability

The moral reasoning construct was measured using the survey instrument selected for this study. The 16-item HBVCI for measuring moral reasoning among athletes was unaltered from its use in previous studies. For this research, the 16-item HBVCI designed by Hahm et al. (1989) resulted in an internal consistency level of $\alpha = .824$. Based on previous work by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), this alpha level was within the range of acceptable internal consistency and is well suited for formative or exploratory studies.

Research Questions

To answer the three research questions for this study, a 2 (athlete gender: male vs. female) x 2 (athlete status: intercollegiate athlete vs. college student/non-athlete) ANOVA was conducted on the moral reasoning scores. For research question one, there was a statistically significant main effect of gender, $F(1, 206) = 61.41, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$; females had higher moral reasoning scores ($M = 44.74, SD = 7.64$) than males ($M = 35.53, SD = 7.72$). For research question two, there was no statistically significant main effect of athlete status, $F(1, 206) = .10, p = .75, \eta_p^2 < .001$; intercollegiate athletes ($M = 39.05, SD = 8.53$) had comparable mean scores as college students ($M = 37.45, SD = 8.95$).

Finally, for research question three, there was no statistically significant interaction between athlete gender and athlete status, $F(1, 206) = 1.26, p = .26, \eta_p^2 = .01$.

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to describe and analyze levels of moral reasoning for intercollegiate athletes and college students who were non-intercollegiate athletes, especially in regards to gender. The data for this population revealed that females ($M= 44.74$; $SD= 7.64$) morally reason at a statistically significant higher level than males ($M= 35.53$; $SD= 7.72$). These results support what previous research has indicated, namely, that male athletes that have been assessed with the HBVCI instrument tend to reveal a significantly lower level of moral reasoning than female athletes (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009). Based on the deontological theoretical construction of the HBVCI measurement instrument that was used to assess this population, the results of this study showed that females are more cognitively aware of moral obligations relative to honesty, responsibility, and justice than are males (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009). These results supported what has been found in virtually every previous HBVCI-based sport study; females morally reason at a statistically significant higher level than males (Beller & Stoll, 1995; Bredemeier & Shields, 1986; Crown & Heatherington, 1989). Additionally, the results of this study further dispute the findings of earlier sport studies such as Rest's (1973) research that found female athletes morally reason at a lower level than male athletes. It should be noted, however, that Rest's study utilized a different instrument (Defining Issues Test) that was more concerned with justice than honesty and responsibility. Furthermore, the DIT was geared more toward assessing moral development by having respondents rank different moral dilemmas, as opposed to asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement with each stated moral dilemma the way that the HBVCI does.

One possible explanation for this measured significant gender difference in level of moral reasoning came from the work of Penny and Priest (1990), who found that recruited female athletes morally reason at a much higher level than recruited male athletes. For their study, there were 39 female intercollegiate athletes and 23 female intramural sport athletes, while there were 67 male intercollegiate athletes and 82 male intramural sport athletes. Therefore, since 50% of the sample for this study included recruited Division I intercollegiate athletes, it stands to reason that the insights of Penny and Priest (1990) and Krause and Priest (1999) might apply here, too. Furthermore, these scholars' research within intercollegiate athletics settings also suggested that non-recruited female athletes, such as intramural sport athletes, morally reason at higher level than male intercollege or intramural sport athletes. Their findings might apply to the results of this study as well, since many of the athletes in the present study identified themselves as intramural sport participants. Future studies might want to explore what potential role and impact recruitment might play in an athlete's level of moral reasoning and if there is any relationship between being recruited at various levels of NCAA competition and level of moral reasoning.

Another possible explanation for the resultant gender differences in level of moral reasoning relates to cognitive orientation and gender stereotyping. Earlier research on the difference between men and women in regards to moral reasoning was conducted by Gilligan (1982), who posited that men show more of an orientation toward justice, while women demonstrate more of an orientation toward care. Gilligan partially formulated this opinion based on the research of Chodorow (1974), who hypothesized that important differences in developmental processes for males and females end up encouraging in males and discouraging in females certain aspects of the self-related to moral reasoning (i.e., achievement behaviors, self/other differentiation, and independence). According to this thinking, then, the cognitive

processes of moral judgments are often unique to each gender. Thus, males are more concerned with evaluating the “principles and rules of a situation” (justice), while females are more focused on assessing the relationship aspects and the potential “responses of others” (Crown & Heatherington, 1989, p. 282). However, as Crown and Heatherington noted, this is not always universally true, since their own research with undergraduate psychology students indicated mixed results relative to whether or not a particular gender was following more of a justice or care concern in their moral reasoning processes.

Beyond the mixed results of gender differences in moral reasoning that comes from the research of Chodorow (1974), Gilligan (1982), and Crown and Heatherington (1989) exists the issue of the sample of study subjects that were utilized. None of these scholars sampled athlete populations and even though some of their research involved moral judgments and moral reasoning on topics of competitive sports, the respondents were not athletes. Hence, when comparing the results of their research with the results of the present study, it is difficult to discern whether or not gender differences in moral reasoning of this study were the result of an orientation toward either justice or care/concern. Finally, the results of the current study and other HBVCI-based research might even suggest that females have a stronger orientation towards justice than males.

This research also asked if intercollegiate athletes morally reason at a different level than college students who are not athletes. There was no statistically significant main effect of athlete ($M= 39.05$; $SD= 8.53$) versus college student/non-athlete ($M= 37.45$; $SD= 8.95$), $F(1, 206) = .10$, $p = .75$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$, which does not support what has been noted in previous moral reasoning in sport studies. Most notably, these previous studies indicated that collegiate athletes have consistently measured lower levels of moral reasoning compared to college students who are not athletes (Bredemeier & Shields, 1984; Hall, 1981). One possible explanation for these measured results relates to the prior competitive athlete background of the respondents who are not college athletes. These non-collegiate sport athlete respondents were selected for inclusion in this study by virtue of their enrollment in sport industry major undergraduate courses. In fact, many of these respondents indicated that they were once competitive athletes or that they currently participated in university sponsored intramural sports. Thus, it is possible that these respondents are just as influenced by the competitive athletic setting, as are the collegiate athletes in this study because of prior athletic experience. This would mean, at least in terms of the lasting imprint of the competitive sport experience, that current intramural sport athletes or former high school athletes probably have similar moral reasoning tendencies as those who currently compete in intercollegiate athletics. This conclusion would be supported by the seminal study involving the use of the HBVCI, which found that hundreds of randomly selected high school athletes from 14 different schools morally reasoned at a statistically significant level lower than randomly selected non-athletes from the same schools (Beller & Stoll, 1995).

The third research question asked about the interaction effects of gender (male or female) and athlete status (athlete versus student/non-athlete). The results indicated that there was no statistically significant interaction between athlete gender and athlete status, $F(1, 206) = 1.26$, $p = .26$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. One possible explanation for these results might stem from the limited number of respondents and lack of diversity within each gender. For example, there were 62 total female respondents, of whom 32 were intercollegiate athletes and 30 were college students. Thus, the study design, including the use of a convenient sample, combined with a limited number of overall female respondents, might have accounted for the lack of interaction effects.

Practical Implications

Given the win at all cost mentality that permeates throughout the competitive sport world today (Eitzen & Sage, 2009), it is imperative that sport managers, such as coaches and athletic administrators, find ways to effectively develop higher levels of moral reasoning among athletes. Furthermore, the necessary educational processes that sport administrators utilize to develop higher levels of moral reasoning need to take into consideration the resultant data from this study (i.e., moral and ethical development educational approaches by sport managers at the collegiate level must take into account that female athletes already display more maturity in this cognitive area). To this end, sport scholars have already seen encouraging results with moral development educational programs administered among populations of athletes that participated in moral reasoning course work (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009). These educational programs have occurred at the collegiate level in physical education curriculum (Rolider, Cooper, & Houten, 1984) and during sport summer camps (Bredemeier, Weiss, Shields, & Shewchuk, 1986). It seems appropriate based on these results to consider instituting a similar moral development program for collegiate athletes as part of their overall educational curriculum.

Since moral reasoning is considered to be a predictor of ethical behavior (Galbraith & Jones, 1976) among athletes (University of Idaho Center of ETHICS*, 2009), the results of this study might be interpreted as reason for concern regarding the behavior of male athletes. At a minimum, based on the calibration of the HBVCI measuring instrument that was used for this research (measuring honesty, responsibility, and justice), male college athletes might be especially prone to unethical behavior in the sport arena. Scholars such as Duska and Whelan (1975) believed that low levels of moral reasoning and poor ethical behavior all boils down to a lack of respect a person has for rules in any aspect of life, including sport. Thus, the moral development educational programs for athletes at the collegiate level ought to teach and emphasize the value of honesty, responsibility, and justice within the framework of the rules of the sport.

According to Drewe (1999), measured moral reasoning scores can be used by coaches and athletic administrators to “facilitate the development of the critical thinking skills and dispositions required in moral reasoning if they were aware of where their athletes were in need of guidance” (p. 117). The results of this study showed that athletes are in need of guidance in not only deepening their sense of honesty, responsibility, and justice, but in better understanding their deontological motives. For instance, several of the items on the HBVCI deal with determining whether or not an athlete blames the breaking of a rule on themselves or on the officials. Therefore, moral development educational programs, as well as the daily leadership and teaching provided by coaches, ought to include some intentional cognitive processing of these types of moral dilemmas with athletes. If teachers, coaches, and athletic administrators do not address these kinds of moral dilemmas with athletes, then sport participants might never be aware of where they are particularly in need of further moral awareness and development.

It should also be noted that there is no particular universally accepted method for delivering moral education. The examples of moral development programs discussed above are a few of the successful sport and athletic initiatives that have been used before, but by no means represent the totality of what has been tested in every setting or context. Furthermore, since females, in this study as well as in various other research, appear to consistently measure at a higher level of moral reasoning, it might be wise to construct unique moral development

curriculum for each gender. Ultimately, though, as the work of Berkowitz and Oser (2008) highlights, virtually all scholars agree that at a minimum teaching moral development needs to be interdisciplinary in nature. Thus, moral development curriculum for athletes needs to utilize the vast insights provided by academic fields such as education, psychology, sociology, and sport that relate to cognitive, interpersonal, and social growth of individuals that occurs in a teams or organizational setting. Furthermore, seminal research on the topic by Beller and Stoll (1995) has long recommended that moral development education for scholastic athletes' take an approach that teaches athletes not to objectify opponents and fosters an attitude of personal responsibility over self-accomplishments. Finally, moral development curriculum for athletes should be reflective in nature (i.e., such as martial arts that incorporate sport specific acumen while emphasizing the philosophy of sport) and allow student athletes the opportunity to openly discuss the various moral and ethical issues that are present in their sport on a regular basis.

Future Research

Based on the results of this study, future research should consider testing other variables such as race/ethnicity, religiosity, length of sport participation, and educational training or course work in ethics in order to determine plausible strong influencers of moral reasoning for intercollegiate athletes. Furthermore, these future studies should include athletes that attend both public and private colleges/universities, at all levels of competition (Division I, II, and III). Also, the question of who should teach moral development curriculum to athletes is open for debate. Since coaches and athletic administrators are likely to be former competitive athletes who hold similar views as the athletes they coach and lead, then it stands to reason that someone other than these professionals ought to instruct the program.

Research Limitations

The most obvious limitation of this research relates to the convenience sampling that was utilized in the methodology of the study. Convenience sampling limits the generalizability of study findings, so the results of this research cannot be applied to other athletes in any other time and place. Additionally, since many of the athletes who participated in this study were attendees of AIA, caution should be exercised when viewing the results of this study, (i.e., the attitudes and opinions of these athletes might not represent those of other collegiate athletes who do not attend meetings of this organization). Since AIA is a Christian religious organization, there are likely Bible-based lessons and teachings at each meeting that might influence the moral development and ethical paradigm of those who attend. This influence could affect the way that study participants responded to questionnaire items, although the principal investigator did not witness such relevant ethical or moral teaching during the numerous meetings he attended. Finally, it should also be noted that there were many non-collegiate athletes in attendance at AIA meetings who participated in the study, just as there were quite a few varsity athletes in sport studies classrooms who participated in the study (yet do not participate in AIA).

Although the total number of respondents for this study (N= 213) was acceptable for obtaining adequate statistical power, the relatively small number of female respondents (n= 62) might be a concern when interpreting the statistical power of the results related to gender. Additionally, as previously mentioned, there could be some permanency in lower levels of moral reasoning once an individual is exposed to the competitive athletic culture at any point in his or

her life. This notion would equally apply to males and females, and was supported by the results of this study.

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