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### **Peer Leadership and Ethical Conduct: Team Captains' Perceptions of NCAA Athletic Conference Codes of Ethics**

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*National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) conferences have developed codes of ethics to encourage ethical behavior and discourage unethical behavior; however, ethical violations continue to occur across intercollegiate athletics. Given peer leaders have a strong influence on others' behaviors; this study focuses on perceptions of team captains perceptions of conference codes of ethics. A total of 291 team captains were surveyed across three different NCAA sports (basketball, soccer, golf). Overall, team captains agreed with the themes most commonly found in conference codes of ethics. However, team captains were rather neutral as to their role in encouraging ethical conduct from their teammates ( $M = 4.27$ ) and their responsibility for encouraging ethical conduct among their teammates ( $M = 4.50$ ). Further, they were only somewhat familiar with their conference's code of ethics ( $M = 3.64$ ) and did not feel strongly that their teammates followed their lead with regard to ethical conduct ( $M = 3.79$ ).*

**N**umerous incidents of unethical conduct among intercollegiate athletes, both on and off the field, have made headlines in recent years. The following are just a few examples. In February 2013, four University of Alabama football players were suspended indefinitely for robbery and fraudulent use of a credit card (Wolken, 2013). Elizabeth Lambert, a former University of New Mexico soccer player, gained infamy for elbowing, punching, and slamming an opponent to the ground during a college match (Lopresti, 2009). Prior to playing Penn State, a Boston College

women's soccer player was suspended for Tweeting inflammatory comments about child sex-abuser Jerry Sandusky (Moyer, 2012). The FBI investigated allegations of point-shaving at Auburn University (Tate, 2012), while three San Diego State University men's basketball players were charged with a similar incident (McKnight, 2012).

A review of the history of intercollegiate athletics would reveal many similar lapses in judgment by athletes with regard to questionable conduct in a variety of areas such as hazing (Blymer, 2012; Vacchiano, 2012), sexual impropriety (Murphy, 2010; Perez-Pena, 2012), gambling (Matuszewski, 2011), drugs (Rubin, 2012), and improper contact with agents (Yanda, 2010). These incidents are problematic as values related to sportsmanship and integrity are an integral part of the NCAA's mission on enforcement (see NCAA, 2012). Unethical behavior threatens all of the positive benefits and can also result in penalties from various governing bodies, legal liability, loss of reputation, and damage to the university's brand that may further harm the institution (Preston, 2012). The key to sustaining ethical behavior requires going beyond compliance. Administrators, coaches, and athletes must take steps to prevent unethical and illegal conduct from arising in the first place, while simultaneously strengthening organizational values and accountability through the implementation of codes of conduct (Greenwell, Geist, Mahony, Jordan, & Pastore, 2001).

Various National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic conferences have established codes of conduct to address ethical problems and to encourage future ethical choices from employees and athletes (Greenwell et al., 2001), yet ethical violations still exist. Prior literature has examined athletes' (Greenwell, Grube, Jordan & Mahony, 2004) and coaches' (Jordan, Greenwell, Geist, Pastore, & Mahony, 2004) perceptions of codes of ethics lending insight into how those codes are viewed by key participants. Given the power influential peers have in shaping others' conduct (Astin, 1993; Shook & Keup, 2012) an understanding of peer leaders', specifically team captains', perceptions of codes of ethics is the logical next step to understanding how ethical conduct is encouraged among athletes. Understanding team captain's perceptions of ethical codes of conduct can offer administrators, coaches, and athletes' insight into what captains communicate as well as if and how they hold fellow athletes accountable for unethical behavior.

Due to the potential for a breakdown in the communication of expected ethical behavior from coach to athlete, there needs to be an investigation into the role peers play in the development of ethics among athletes. It is important to look at team captains because they likely have a significant impact on their fellow teammates. Therefore, this study examines the perceptions of conference codes of ethics among NCAA team captains from three different men's and women's sports: men's and women's basketball (high-profile sport), men's and women's soccer (lower profile team sport), and men's and women's golf (lower profile individual sport). The following section examines the literature related to codes of ethics to illustrate their purpose, effectiveness, and how key stakeholders perceive them. As one of the primary roles of team captains is to provide peer leadership, the next section provides a review of the literature related to peer leadership.

## Codes of Ethics

The purpose of a code of ethics is to give members of an organization or association guidelines for ethical behavior (Railborn & Payne, 1990). They are typically formal documents that outline rules for behavior and express an organization's values (Adams, Tashchian, & Shore,

2001; Valentine & Barnett, 2002). Within the context of NCAA conferences, codes are designed to communicate the expected behaviors from athletes, coaches, administrators, and game officials. In a review of NCAA conference codes of ethics across all three divisions, Greenwell et al. (2001) determined there were seven major themes in codes of ethics including 1) sportsmanship, 2) values, 3) creating and maintaining a healthy competitive environment, 4) compliance with rules and decisions, 5) equitable treatment, 6) welfare of athletes, and 7) professional conduct of coaches and administrators. Further, this study identified areas of conduct conferences most often designated as being unethical (i.e., physical abuse, inciting abusive action, negative recruiting, obscene gestures and profanity, gambling, tobacco/alcohol usage, taunting/verbal abuse, and public criticism of officials, conference or opponents).

The mere existence of an ethical code does not ensure ethical behavior or a reduction in unethical behavior (Helin & Sanstrom, 2007; Kaptein, 2011). To be effective, a code of ethics must be part of organizational culture (Mahony, Geist, Jordan, Greenwell, & Pastore, 1999). Thus, codes must be embraced by leaders (Stevens, 2008) and relevant to the stakeholders addressed in the code (Wood & Rimmer, 2003). A number of studies have suggested that leaders affect the ethical behavior of co-workers or subordinates (Ambrose & Schminke, 1999; Fulmer, 2004; May, Hodges, Chan, & Avolio, 2005). Kaptein (2011) found that when codes of ethics were embraced by lower-level management, those with the most contact with employees, less unethical behavior occurred in the workplace. There must be a buy-in, or acceptance, from the key personnel (administrators, coaches, athletes). Without the acceptance, codes are likely to be ignored or used only for public relations purposes.

Given the importance of acceptance from stakeholders, a number of studies exists examining coaches' and athletes' perceptions of codes of ethics. Considering coaches are often put in the position of enforcing ethical conduct among their athletes, Jordan, Greenwell, Geist, Pastore and Mahony (2003) surveyed NCAA coaches to determine their agreement with what was typically contained in NCAA conference codes of ethics. For the most part, coaches agreed with the themes outlined in their conference's code of ethics, and they showed support for their respective codes of ethics. However, many indicated a lack of familiarity with their own conference's code of ethics.

As a follow-up, Greenwell et al. (2004) surveyed athletes across one NCAA Division I conference to obtain the point of view of people who are most affected by acceptable standards of behavior both on and off the field. Their responses indicated they believed strongly, as a group, in the implementation and use of these codes, but that they had not read through them, leaving athletes unaware of the complete standard of acceptable behavior. In fact, 88.2% felt it important for athletes to be familiar with their conference's code of ethics, but only 22% had read their conference's code of ethics. Interestingly, 84% of the athletes in this study responded that athletes should be responsible for their own ethical conduct while only 64% said coaches should be responsible. When comparing the results between the two studies, some interesting differences between coaches and their athletes emerged. More coaches (71%) had read their conferences' code of ethics compared to only (22%) of athletes. Rules against negative recruiting were important to athletes but not as important to coaches.

The findings of Jordan et al. (2003) and Greenwell et al. (2004) suggest coaches and athletes perceive codes of conduct to be important. However, there appears to be a disconnect in the communication of ethical codes of conduct between coaches and athletes. Ultimately, coaches are responsible for enforcing ethical behavior, yet the majority of athletes identified ethical behavior and adherence to codes of conduct as their responsibility. If athletes assume

responsibility and accountability for upholding codes of conduct, perhaps it would be useful to examine the role of peers – more specifically, team captains – in the communication of expected ethical behavior.

## Peer Leadership

According to Astin (1993, p. 398), “The student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years.” Given the powerful influence of peers, many colleges and universities have found value in engaging students in peer leadership roles (Haber, 2011; Shook & Keup, 2012). Furthermore, leadership is often included in institutional missions “with emphasis on students developing as responsible citizens or leaders” (Haber, 2011, p. 65).

Peer leaders play a variety of roles including agents of socialization, role models, personal and/or academic support agent, resource and referral agents, and community builders (Cuseo, 2010; Russel & Schinkle, 1990; Shook & Keup, 2012). The benefits of peer leadership include: greater awareness of campus community, enhanced sense of belonging, meaningful interpersonal relationships, increased ownership and commitment to a program, and skill development through the integration of communication, problem solving, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness (Haber, 2011; Shook & Keup, 2012). Conversely, “student peer leaders also reported over involvement in activities to the detriment of their grades, too much time devoted to peer leadership responsibilities, and stress associated with the peer leadership role” (Shook & Keup, 2012, p. 12)

Traditionally, student affairs literature has identified peer leaders as resident assistants, orientation leaders, academic tutors, or student group organizers. Only a few studies have recognized the athlete as a leader (Holmes, McNeil, & Adorna, 2010; Holmes, McNeil, Adorna, & Procaccino, 2008; Loughead, Hardy, & Eys, 2006) or the role of team captains on intercollegiate athletic teams as peer leaders (Todd & Kent, 2004). Holmes et al. (2010) and Holmes et al. (2008) explored college athletes’ perceptions of formal and informal team leaders. In these studies, athletes identified communication, behavior, and personal characteristics central to good team leaders. Specifically, male and female athletes discussed the importance of team leaders communicating with players, leading by example, and being responsible. Participants identified trust, respect, and a positive attitude as ideal characteristics for a good team leader. In a study on the behaviors of ideal peer leaders, Todd and Kent (2004) reported student-athletes placed little emphasis on the importance of peer leaders helping teammates with personal problems or settling conflict among team members. Instead, athletes identified working hard in practice and games, showing respect for teammates, and high performance expectations as essential for peer leaders (Todd & Kent).

## Method

There are three primary research questions. First, this study asks what team captains either know or believe about codes of ethics and ethical conduct. To address this research question, this study examines team captains’ opinions about the efficacy of codes of ethics, compliance with codes of ethics, and responsibility for ethical conduct. The second research question addresses team captains’ agreement with various designations of unethical conduct. As Schwartz (2000) pointed out, codes of ethics should be based on organizational values rather

than merely emphasizing compliance with rules. Therefore, the final research question addresses team captains' agreement with themes commonly found in codes of ethics. Given each sport is different, for each research question, differences are examined by gender and sport.

### *Sample and procedure*

Team captains of six different sports (three men's and three women's) were surveyed. Men's and women's basketball were selected because of the "high-profile" nature of these sports. Men's and women's soccer, as team sports, were also selected to provide the perspective from lesser profile sports. Men's and women's golf were selected as a lesser profile sport as well, but also because of the individual and team aspects that come from collegiate golf competition. It was decided to limit the number of sports examined to these three for two reasons. First, findings from prior research by Greenwell et al., (2004) found that these sports were likely to be representative of similar other sports. Second, limiting the number of sports allows for a better comparison across sports and gender, while controlling for variations among sports.

NCAA team captains are a difficult population to reach as many teams do not publicly identify their team captains and email addresses are not readily available for a large percentage of athletes. To overcome the difficulties associated with identifying and reaching team captains, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling is useful in gathering opinions of a target population when probability sampling is infeasible (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011; Gliner & Morgan, 2000). Following IRB approval, a request to participate in the survey was distributed to a selection of sports information directors (SID) along with a link to the online survey. SIDs were identified as the athletic department staff members who would be most likely to have contact information for their institution's team captains. An item on the questionnaire asked for athletes to confirm they were a team captain. To ensure the sample was representative, surveys were distributed to a sample of SIDs at schools in each region of the country in a wide variety of athletic conferences in all three NCAA competitive divisions. SIDs were instructed to distribute the link to the questionnaire to the team captains for each of the sports in the study. Instructions informed athletes that their responses would be confidential, and individual results would not be reported back to their institutions. Survey Monkey was used to collect the data. An online survey was preferred due to its time and cost advantages. A reminder email was sent approximately two weeks after the initial request. Sample characteristics were compared to known characteristics and respondents were compared to non-respondents to control for non-response bias (Andrew et al., 2011; Creswell, 2012; Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009).

### *Instrument*

An instrument developed by Jordan et al., (2004) and refined by Greenwell et al., (2004) was used as the basis of the study. This instrument was based on themes and language found in actual conference codes of ethics, and has been found to be reliable and valid in multiple administrations. Minor wording changes, where applicable, were made to make the instrument specific to team captain's perceptions of codes of ethics. The revised instrument contained three major parts. For the first part, team captains were asked to address their opinions related to the efficacy of codes of ethics, compliance to codes of ethics, and responsibility for following codes

of ethics through a series of seven-point, single-item Likert-type scales anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree”.

The second part of the study concerned team captains’ agreement with various designations of unsportsmanlike conduct. Team captains were asked to address their opinions related to eight different activities codes of ethics commonly designate as unethical (physical abuse, inciting abusive action, negative recruiting, obscene gestures and profanity, gambling, tobacco/alcohol usage, taunting/verbal abuse, and public criticism of officials, conference or opponents) through a series of seven-point, single-item Likert-type scales anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree”.

For the third part of the study, an 18-item scale was used to assess the importance team captains placed on themes commonly found in codes of ethics (athlete welfare, sportsmanship, positive values, healthy competitive environment, equitable treatment, compliance with institutional rules and decisions). Professional conduct was not included in this study, as it applied solely to behavior of coaches and administrators. Three items were used to measure each theme on a seven-point Likert-type scale anchored by “not at all important” and “very important”. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the athlete welfare, sportsmanship, positive values, and compliance with institutional rules and decisions subscales ranged from .763 to .817 indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency (DeVellis, 1991; Nunnally, & Bernstein, 1994). The constructs of healthy competitive environment (.644) and equitable treatment (.615) were somewhat lower than the desired level; however Garson (2013) suggests that a Cronbach's Alpha of .60 is considered acceptable in exploratory research. A confirmatory factor analysis for the scale indicated an acceptable measure of absolute fit (RMSEA = 0.097). Considering this scale was adapted from previously validated work suggesting the themes are all conceptually dissimilar, it was decided to proceed with the measures so that comparisons could be made between this study and prior findings. Demographic data related to sport, gender, age, ethnicity, and NCAA division were also collected.

### *Analysis*

For the first part of the study, means by gender and sport were calculated for each item addressing captains’ opinions related to the efficacy of codes of ethics, compliance to codes of ethics, and responsibility for following codes of ethics. MANOVA was used to determine if there were mean differences in captains’ opinions attributable to gender or sport. For the second part of the study, means by gender and sport were calculated for each item addressing team captains’ agreement with various designations of unsportsmanlike conduct found in codes of ethics. MANOVA was used to determine if there were mean differences in captains’ agreement attributable to gender or sport. For the third part, each theme was a multi-item construct, so summated means were calculated for each of the six different themes. Means for each theme are presented by gender and sport. MANOVA was used to determine if perceptions of each theme varied by gender or sport.

## **Results**

Requests were sent to SIDs at 450 different institutions across the three divisions and responses were received from 218 different institutions (48.4%). Responses were received from 291 captains from a possible 2283 (not all institutions sponsored each sport) for a response rate

of 12.7%. Regression analysis was performed to determine if differences existed between respondents (early respondents) and non-respondents (i.e., late respondents) in order to investigate the possibility of non-response bias. The analysis revealed no significant differences suggesting there was no non-response bias. Responses were received from 291 captains (97 basketball, 120 soccer, 41 golf, 33 did not indicate their sport). One hundred and three of the captains were male, 180 were female (8 did not indicate their gender) and 97.1% were white/Caucasian. The majority (57%) were seniors and the average age was 21.1. Responses were mostly from NCAA Division III team captains (192) followed by NCAA Division I team captains (64) and (26) NCAA Division II team captains. Considering the disparity in numbers of respondents between divisions, MANOVA was used to compare responses between divisions. Results revealed no significant differences in responses; therefore there was no concern that the results would be skewed by the differences in numbers between divisions. Casewise deletion was used to deal with and missing data.

The first section of the study addresses captains' opinions related to the efficacy of codes of ethics, compliance to codes of ethics, and responsibility for following codes of ethics. Overall, only three of the categories had means over 4.0 (the scale's midpoint) and all were related to the captains' personal responsibility. Team captains felt they encouraged ethical conduct from their teammates ( $M = 4.27$ ), were responsible for encouraging ethical conduct among their teammates ( $M = 4.50$ ), and that the team was responsible for regulating their own conduct ( $M = 4.17$ ). Team captains were only somewhat familiar with their conference's code of ethics ( $M = 3.64$ ) and they did not show strong support for the effectiveness of their conference's code of ethics ( $M = 3.64$ ) or the need to be familiar with a conference code of ethics ( $M = 3.90$ ). Further, they did not feel strongly that their teammates followed their lead with regard to ethical conduct ( $M = 3.79$ ). Athletes were neutral as to whether coaches at their school follow their conference's code of ethics ( $M = 3.98$ ), and were less convinced coaches at other schools ( $M = 3.79$ ), their teammates ( $M = 3.59$ ), and athletes at other schools followed the conference's code of ethics ( $M = 3.60$ ). MANOVA indicated the main effects of gender, sport, and NCAA Division were not significant, and there were no significant interaction effects. Descriptive results are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1* - Means for captains' opinions by gender and sport

	Gender			Sport		
	Total	Male	Female	Basketball	Soccer	Golf
A code of ethics is effective in encouraging ethical behavior	3.81	3.64	3.89	3.68	3.93	3.61
My conference's code of ethics is effective in encouraging ethical conduct	3.64	3.57	3.69	3.75	3.57	3.44
Athletes should be familiar with their conference's code of ethics	3.90	3.53	4.06	3.62	4.16	3.68
I am familiar with my conference's code of ethics	3.64	3.53	3.73	3.76	3.63	3.61
The coaches at our school follow our conference's code of ethics	3.98	3.97	3.98	4.07	3.94	3.98
Coaches at other conference schools follow our conference's code of ethics	3.69	3.60	3.72	3.66	3.64	3.61
My teammates follow the conference's code of ethics	3.59	3.39	3.76	3.70	3.75	3.32
Athletes at other conference universities follow the conference's code of ethics	3.60	3.50	3.63	3.48	3.62	3.56
I encourage ethical conduct from my teammates	4.27	4.14	4.41	4.40	4.36	4.54
It is the responsibility of the team captain to encourage ethical conduct among teammates	4.50	4.35	4.62	4.19	4.79	4.22
My teammates follow my lead with regard to ethical conduct	3.79	3.81	3.83	3.76	3.91	3.63
My teammates and I are responsible for regulating our own ethical conduct	4.17	3.94	4.37	4.13	4.42	3.85

The second part of the study concerned team captains' agreement various designations of unsportsmanlike conduct. Overall team captains agreed with each of the designations. Physical abuse ( $M = 6.49$ ) and inciting abusive action ( $M = 6.34$ ) received the highest ratings followed by negative recruiting ( $M = 5.87$ ), obscene gestures and profanity ( $M = 5.86$ ), gambling ( $M = 5.64$ ), alcohol/tobacco use ( $M = 5.61$ ), and taunting/verbal abuse ( $M = 5.58$ ). Public criticism of officials, conference or opponents received the lowest score ( $M = 5.35$ ). MANOVA results were significant for gender [Wilks' Lambda = .922,  $F = (8, 220) = 2.337$ ,  $p = .020$ ], but not for sport or NCAA division. Univariate tests revealed male and female team captains differed on their perceptions of the importance of rules prohibiting public criticism of officials, conference or opponents ( $p = .014$ ), obscene gestures and profanity ( $p = .017$ ), taunting/verbal abuse ( $p < .001$ ), tobacco/alcohol usage ( $p = .015$ ), and gambling ( $p = .027$ ). Female team captains had stronger opinions than male team captains for each. MANOVA indicated the main effects of sport and NCAA Division were not significant, and there were no significant interaction effects. Results are presented in Table 2.

*Table 2* - Means for team captains' agreement of prohibited activities by gender and sport.

	Gender			Sport		
	Total	Male	Female	Basketball	Soccer	Golf
Physical abuse	6.49	6.43	6.51	6.34	6.46	6.68
Inciting abusive action	6.34	6.20	6.42	6.27	6.26	6.64
Negative recruiting	5.87	5.88	5.90	5.86	5.93	5.95
Obscene gestures and profanity	5.86	5.59	6.03	5.76	5.75	6.32
Gambling	5.64	5.33	5.82	5.63	5.59	5.80
Tobacco/Alcohol usage	5.61	5.26	5.82	5.37	5.73	5.80
Taunting/Verbal abuse	5.58	5.10	5.88	5.39	5.53	5.98
Public criticism of officials, conference or opponents	5.35	5.06	5.55	5.45	5.13	5.66

The third part of the study concerned team captains' agreement with themes most commonly found in codes of ethics. Team captains rated athlete welfare ( $M = 6.49$ ), sportsmanship ( $M = 6.48$ ) and positive values ( $M = 6.44$ ) as the themes they agreed with the most followed by a healthy competitive environment ( $M = 6.29$ ) and equitable treatment ( $M = 6.08$ ). Compliance with conference rules ( $M = 5.36$ ) was the theme they agreed with the least. MANOVA results were significant for gender [Wilks' Lambda = .867,  $F = (6, 276) = 7.028$ ,  $p < .001$ ], but not for sport or NCAA division. Univariate tests revealed significant differences for sportsmanship ( $p = .021$ ), positive values ( $p = .021$ ), healthy competitive environment ( $p < .001$ ), and equitable treatment ( $p < .001$ ). Female team captains had stronger opinions than male team captains for each. MANOVA indicated the main effects of sport and NCAA Division were not significant, and there were no significant interaction effects. Results are presented in Table 3.

*Table 3* - Means for team captains' agreement with themes commonly found in NCAA conference codes of ethics by gender and sport

	Gender			Sport		
	Total	Male	Female	Basketball	Soccer	Golf
Athlete welfare	6.49	6.43	6.51	6.37	6.55	6.51
Sportsmanship	6.48	6.38	6.56	6.42	6.51	6.55
Positive values	6.44	6.34	6.53	6.40	6.51	6.48
Healthy competitive environment	6.29	6.09	6.43	6.25	6.31	6.43
Equitable treatment	6.08	5.70	6.29	5.92	6.21	6.13
Compliance with institutional rules and decisions	5.36	5.29	5.42	5.34	5.32	5.71

*Table 4 - Summary of Major Findings*

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1. Team captains may not be fully embracing their roles in regard to encouraging ethical conduct among their peers.
  2. Team captains were often unfamiliar with their own code of ethics and noncommittal as to the necessity to be familiar with a code of ethics.
  3. Team captains strongly agreed with the various designations of unsportsmanlike conduct commonly found in codes of ethics. Physical abuse (M = 6.49) and inciting abusive action (M = 6.34) received the highest ratings.
  4. Team captains strongly agreed with the themes most commonly found in codes of ethics. They rated athlete welfare (M = 6.49), sportsmanship (M = 6.48) and positive values (M = 6.44) the highest. Female team captains had stronger opinions than male team captains for each.
  5. Neither sport (basketball, soccer, golf) nor NCAA division (Division I, Division II, Division III) predicted differences in ethical perceptions.
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## Discussion

Considering the potential impact of ethical violations in intercollegiate athletics it is important to investigate ways to curb unethical behavior. As such, NCAA conferences have developed codes of ethics to encourage ethical behavior and discourage unethical behavior. However, little research has investigated the roles of significant peers in promoting ethical conduct and their perceptions of codes of ethics. The present study sought to extend research in a number of areas. First, the present study adds to the literature athletes' perceptions of the efficacy of codes of conduct, as well as compliance with ethical codes and responsibility for regulating ethical conduct. Second, we extended the research to include the role of peer leadership in communicating and enforcing codes of conduct. In general, this study found that team captains were in agreement with the content found in codes of ethics, but were tepid as to their roles as leaders and to the value of a code of ethics. Overall, results of this study imply that team captains may not be fully embracing their roles in regard to encouraging ethical conduct among their peers. An analysis of the findings and implications related to each of the findings follow.

As for how team captains perceived their roles, results indicate they encouraged or felt the responsibility to encourage ethical conduct among their teammates. However, scores in these areas were only slightly above the midpoint, suggesting team captains were rather indifferent as to their role in encouraging ethical conduct. Considering this is a study about ethics, one would expect respondents to rate the items high on the scale. Anything lower would indicate a degree of indifference toward these ethical concepts. Further, the purpose of a code of ethics is to encourage ethical behavior (Railborn & Payne, 1990). When respondents rate these aspects near the midpoint, it indicates these codes are ineffective as the respondents have not developed dispositions indicating they believe in the efficacy of codes of ethics. This finding is disturbing, but not surprising.

While coaches and administrators often look to team captains to be role models for their peers, team captains look to coaches and administrators for support and evidence codes of conduct are being upheld. In other words, team captains rely on coaches and administrators to communicate codes of conduct, which captains can reinforce thereby perpetuating an ethical team culture. Our findings showed that team captains were only somewhat familiar with their conference's code of conduct. Additionally, team captains did not feel familiarity with the conference code of conduct was important or that conference codes of conduct were effective. This finding indicates a fairly weak team culture in which expectations with regards to ethical conduct may not be communicated from administration to coaches to players. Moreover, this finding may be related to other research that suggested coaches showed a lack of familiarity with their own conference's code of ethics (Jordan et al., 2003). If coaches are not familiar with codes of conduct, it is unlikely such codes will be discussed and/or enforced by athletes.

To alleviate this disconnect, conferences need to ensure codes of ethics are being conveyed to athletes through coaches and administrators. In an attempt to be proactive, most NCAA colleges and universities have educational programs for their coaches and athletes in which department compliance officers explain organizational rules and regulations as well as accountability measures. Ethical behavior is implied (i.e., "follow the rules"), but not explicitly discussed as ethical issues are often addressed on a case-by-case basis. While the communication of ethical codes has the potential to strengthen organizational values and accountability (Greenwell et al., 2001), additional follow-up with athletes is needed to reinforce codes of conduct and expectations about ethical behavior.

Further, team captains should be encouraged to take an active part in the dissemination of their codes of ethics. Involving team captains in this process, another level of leadership besides coaches and administrators, will help to make athletes more knowledgeable about their expected standard of behavior both on and off the field and more accountable to team leaders. A number of NCAA colleges and universities (e.g., University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, Oregon State University, Dartmouth College, University of Louisville) have leadership programs for athletes. Programs such as these should strive to include helping team captains develop proactive plans for disseminating codes of conduct. Furthermore, coaches and athletic and university administrators should help athletes develop a strategic plan for addressing codes of conduct and unethical behaviors over the course of an athletic season. Additionally, athletes should receive training on how to address teammates with concerns about unethical behavior. As noted by Shook and Keup (2012), "Trained peer leaders are effective because they have the potential to be role models and encourage academic and social responsibility" (p. 14). Training should include simulated role-plays in which athletes can develop interpersonal skills set and confidence in approaching teammates about difficult issues. Teaching ethics through the use of role-play has proven beneficial in curricular (McKeachie, 2010) and extra-curricular (Harvey, Kirk, & O'Donovan, 2012) settings. Finally, training is particularly important considering that the athletes in this study felt a responsibility to uphold codes of conduct. Thus, it is important for administrators and coaches to equip athletes with tools to help them communicate codes of conduct to teammates. Finally, and most importantly, team captains should participate in training within conference and athletic department officials and coaches. The training should provide education on codes of conduct as well as opportunities for team captains and coaches to engage in conversations and practice addressing case studies on ethical behavior.

Unless conferences actively try to educate influential athletes -- those students accepted by peers with a strong athletic competency and perceived leadership ability (Moran & Weiss,

2006) -- about these codes, the information being conveyed will be lost with little positive impact. Painter-Morland (2010) argued that the communication of codes of ethics may be as important as their content. Most codes of ethics are seldom read, therefore organizations need to question how codes of ethics are distributed or communicated. To remedy this situation, it is important to communicate the value of a code of ethics and build a culture of ethical conduct. Codes on their own will not be effective unless they are part of an ethical culture (Nyberg, 2008), which requires extensive dissemination and training (Valentine & Fleischman, 2007). How a code is implemented has an impact on the effectiveness of a code of ethics (Singh, 2011). Content can be disseminated through specialized trainings, meetings with team captains, instruction to coaches, and improved public relations through web sites and other media. It is not enough to just distribute a code of ethics. Regular and quality communication is vital to improving the likelihood the code will have an effect on ethical behavior (Kaptein, 2011; Stevens, 2008). It is also troubling to note that team captains did not feel that coaches and athletes (at both their school and other schools) followed their conference's code of ethics. This finding indicates some degree of mistrust of the actions of other teams and teammates, which may justify a reduced emphasis on ethical conduct. Much of this attitude may be due to athletes merely not knowing what others are doing.

Sims (1992) attributed unethical behavior to four factors: (a) rewarding unethical behavior; (b) incongruent values between top-level management and the organization; (c) an appearance of ethics, but actions are unethical; and, (d) justification of unethical behavior. The media covers a myriad of NCAA investigations into unethical conduct. On many occasions, the investigations cannot find evidence of unethical behavior, so the athlete remains eligible to compete. However, the perception often associated with an investigation is that unethical behavior occurred. Continued participation, particularly on a successful team, is a reward for perceived unethical behavior. Furthermore, if captains feel others are not acting ethically, they may be less inclined to act ethically themselves. This attitude was witnessed recently as part of baseball's steroid scandal where athletes justified their use as "no one else is following the rules, why should I." Therefore, as part of the education and training of team captains, it is important to communicate what other teams, both at the institution and at other institutions, are doing to promote ethical conduct. This communication should help alleviate the mistrust thereby removing team captains' excuses for not promoting ethical conduct.

Overall, team captains strongly agreed with the content included in conference codes of ethics. Despite this agreement, team captains were often unfamiliar with their own code of ethics and noncommittal as to the necessity to be familiar with a code of ethics. This finding seems to contradict the earlier finding, which suggests team captains encourage ethical behavior and feel responsible for regulating ethical conduct. If team captains feel they are responsible for encouraging and regulating behavior, but are not familiar with nor do they perceive a code of ethics as necessary, how is ethical behavior defined, encouraged, and enforced? Interestingly, this finding is not unique to athletics as Ibrahim, Angelis, and Tomic (2009) argue there is often a cynicism among managers as to the effectiveness of codes of ethics.

Given these results, it appears that codes of ethics are not being effectively communicated to team captains, and team captains do not necessarily see the importance of knowing their code of ethics. Thus, codes of conduct and expectations about ethical behavior may not be addressed by team captains. Coaches and administrators must be aware, however, that team captains participate in social exchange with teammates. The social exchange dynamic is such that team captains may seek acceptance and friendship to maintain peer relationships

(Moran & Weiss, 2006). Thus, maintaining relationships may also affect enforcement and regulation of ethical conduct. As reported by Shook and Keup (2012), stress associated with being a peer leader may have detrimental effects on what and how information and expectations are communicated. Together, these findings imply team captains may not embrace their roles as encouraging ethical conduct.

Regarding the themes found in codes of ethics, team captains across all three sports agreed with the themes found in codes of ethics, as all were rated relatively high. Five of the six themes were rated above 6.0 on a 7-point scale, indicating team captains shared the same core values their conferences promoted. Team captains most strongly agreed with themes related to athlete welfare (highest priority should be the education of athletes, athletic departments should provide quality competitive opportunities, athlete welfare should be a priority), followed by issues related to sportsmanship and promotion of positive values. Similarly, team captains agreed with the specific activities typically prohibited in codes of ethics. Team captains felt most strongly that issues of physical abuse and inciting abusive action were activities needing to be addressed in a code of ethics. Interestingly, compliance with institutional rules and decisions was the only theme rated below 6.0 and public criticism of officials, conference or opponents was rated lowest among the eight listed prohibited activities. The fact that these two areas were the lowest rated suggests team-captains, while strongly agreeing with the content within the codes of ethics, agreed less with areas that seemed to limit their autonomy.

It is also important to note that several gender differences were found in this study. Female team captains felt more strongly than male team captains that codes of ethics should have language prohibiting public criticism of officials, conference or opponents, obscene gestures and profanity, taunting/verbal abuse, tobacco/alcohol usage, and gambling. Similarly, females more strongly agreed with the themes of sportsmanship, positive values, healthy competitive environment, and equitable treatment. This finding is common in the business ethics literature where women have been found to be more aligned with ethical principles. For example, Simga-Mugan, Daly, Onkal, and Kavut (2005) found women have a greater ethical sensitivity and Nguyen (2008) found females' ratings of ethical judgment were higher than males. Similarly, Ibrahim et al (2009) found males and females had different attitudes toward codes of ethics. Specifically, females were more likely to believe codes of ethics would raise ethical levels and define limits of acceptable conduct. Males, on the other hand, were more likely to believe codes of ethics would protect inefficient professionals and hurt the growth of businesses. In addition, males were more likely to believe people would violate the code of ethics if they thought they could avoid detection. In a sport context, Lee, Whitehead, and Ntourmanis (2007) found males were more likely than females to accept unethical behavior such as cheating. However, Miller, Roberts, and Ommundsen (2004) suggested there is no difference in the ethical beliefs and behavior between male and female athletes.

The findings from the current study imply male team captains are less likely than female team captains to agree with in what is included in codes of ethics, and therefore, less likely to model good behavior for their teammates. As Gill (2002) suggested, gender differences in ethical behavior could be related to how boys and girls are socialized at a young age suggesting athletes may enter college with established beliefs about ethical conduct. This behavior may be rooted in athletes' high school experiences as Kay and Ward (2010) found male high-school athletes were more accepting of various unethical sport situations, especially player aggression, than female athletes. Further, a study of college student athletes discovered that the ethical decision making for male and female athletes declined over a four-year college career (Priest, Krause, & Beach,

1999). Men, however, were more likely than women to have a “win at all costs” attitude (Priest, Krause, & Beach). As such, athletic departments may be more challenged to change the culture of male athletes than female athletes.

It is also important to note that there were no significant differences in perceptions between the captains of the various sports (basketball, soccer, golf) or between the captains competing in the different divisions (Division I, Division II, Division III). These findings indicate a consistency across athletes in different sports and different levels. Specifically, captains of high profile teams (basketball) were similar to captains of lower profile teams such (soccer and golf) in their perceptions of codes of ethics. Further, captains of individual sports (golf) had similar perceptions as captains of team sports (basketball and soccer). Given the differences in competitive level and scholarship status between the three NCAA divisions, it was surprising there were no differences in captains’ ethical perceptions across levels. These findings indicate that sport or division may not have an influence on ethical perceptions. .

Often, codes of ethics are formulated to serve organizational self-interests. For example, a sport organization or association may develop a code of ethics to insulate themselves from sanctions from their respective governing bodies (e.g., NCAA, USOC,). Codes developed to adhere to regulations or lessen legal threats encourage only routinized compliance (Fisher, 2001). In addition, this approach to a code of ethics defines acceptable behavior, but does not sufficiently guide moral reasoning (Painter-Morland, 2010; Schwartz, 2000). Together, these arguments suggest that codes of ethics are largely symbolic unless there is a commitment from organizations, and leaders within those organizations, to using codes of ethics to create a culture of ethical conduct. Thus, the implication is that if athletes have little knowledge about a code of ethics for their team, department, or conference, they may have difficulty creating a strong ethical team culture (Mahony et al, 1999).

## Limitations and Future Research

This study’s finding indicate team captains agreed with the themes found in codes of ethics, but did not believe codes of ethics were effective in encouraging ethical behavior and were rather indifferent as to their roles as peer leaders in encouraging ethical conduct among their teammates. In their roles as team captains, athletes are often called upon to lead and motivate teammates, but results from this study suggest they may not see encouraging ethical behavior as part of their roles. This study is limited in that the results address what team captains thought, but not why. Future research should further delve into why team captains do not perceive this role as strongly as others. Specifically, research should investigate athletes’ perceived responsibilities as peer leaders and how accountability for encouraging ethical conduct could be integrated into those responsibilities. Given the emphasis on athlete leadership within athletic departments and teams, research should investigate how to incorporate ethical leadership among the themes of teambuilding, performance, motivation, etc. commonly emphasized. This research could be extended to coaches and administrators to understand the expectations they place on team captains to enforce codes and regulate ethical conduct among their peers.

While there is a degree of agreement about what should be in a code of ethics, results from this study suggest shortcomings in how codes are implemented. Therefore this future research should investigate themes such as integration of codes of ethics and the role codes of ethics have in creating an ethical culture. Specifically, research should explore the manner in

which athletic departments and coaches communicate codes of conduct, and how they incorporate ethical themes into their athletic culture.

Future research could also investigate some of the discrepancies between coaches' beliefs and athletes' beliefs. For example, results from this study were consistent with the results from Greenwell et al. (2004) in that rules against negative recruiting were important to athletes. However, Jordan et al. (2003) found that rules against negative recruiting were not as important to coaches. This discrepancy is also found between coaches' strategies and practice as Seifried (2007) found men's basketball coaches did not build negative recruiting into their strategies, but negative recruiting still happens with many coaches (Dixon, Turner, Pastore, & Mahoney, 2003; Fondren, 2010). Therefore, future research should address why coaches do not feel these rules are necessary, despite the fact these practices continue to happen against the wishes of athletes.

This study also examined captains of three sports. While these three sports represent a good cross-section of sports competing in intercollegiate athletics, it is entirely possible that athletes competing in some sports, with different rules and sport culture, may present different opinions toward ethical conduct. For example, athletes competing in football, arguably the most visible sport, may have different opinions due to the unique nature of the sport (e.g. visibility, perceived importance, roster size, physical nature). Therefore, additional research may incorporate captains of more sports.

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