A MORAL REASONING INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the effects of an intense intervention program on the moral reasoning and development of intercollegiate student-athletes. One hundred and sixty-nine subjects were pre-, post-, and postpost-evaluated with the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory and the Defining Issues Test. Thirty-seven student-athletes were randomly selected to enroll in the two-credit course, with 132 serving as controls. This study shows that an intense "Moral Reasoning in Sport" course appears to increase cognitive moral reasoning and development in intercollegiate student-athletes.

A MORAL REASONING INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR DIVISION I STUDENT-ATHLETES

Historically, moral reasoning, moral development, and character development research within sport and physical education has been descriptive and prescriptive in nature, with a limited number of intervention programs implemented exclusively in physical education classrooms. The studies typically describe a physical education or sport participant's current state of moral knowledge or behavior with no research directed toward what ethically should be. Two intervention studies that investigated moral reasoning or development in sport were limited to elementary or junior high sport participants (Bredemeier, Weiss, Shields, & Shewchuck, 1986; Wandzilak, Carroll, & Ansorge, 1988). No studies were identified that examined the effects of an intervention program on intercollegiate student-athletes. Most studies

noted equivocal differences in moral reasoning and development by gender (Beller, 1991; Bredemeier & Shields, 1984, 1986; Hahm, 1989; Hall, 1981; Penny & Priest, 1990). All current studies used a psychological research base to study moral reasoning or development in sport; no programs used philosophy or ethics as the applied intervention strategy.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the effects of an experimental applied normative ethics intervention program on the moral reasoning and moral development levels of Division I university age student-athletes.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The theoretical framework for moral reasoning and moral development models is typically based in psychological theory as either internalization or constructivist. Within the two models are more specific theories such as behavioral, psychoanalytical, social learning, and structural development [cognitive development] (Weiss & Bredemeier, 1990).

Basically, internalization models are comprised of psychoanalytic and social learning theories, with the latter most commonly used in sport and physical education. Social learning theorists hold that morality is learned through socialization processes, a kind of "bag of virtues" approach (Kohlberg, 1976, 1981). Social learning theorists believe that individuals model their behavior after others who personify the particular trait, value, or virtue desired (Haan, 1978; Kohlberg, 1976, 1981; Weiss & Bredemeier, 1990). Moral development, therefore, is the process by which individuals adopt society's notions of acceptable values and behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Kleiber & Roberts, 1981; McGuire & Thomas, 1975).

Constructivists, on the other hand, disagree with the social learning approach to moral development and moral education (Haan, 1978; Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 1932; Rest, 1973; Weiss & Bredemeier, 1990). Essentially, constructivists concern themselves with cognitive development relative to moral growth (Bredemeier & Weiss, 1990; Haan, 1978, 1983; Kohlberg, 1971, 1976; Piaget, 1932; Rest, 1973). Defined, morality reflects the extent to which individuals use principles to guide action. These researchers hold that moral understandings are logically structured and developed through stages of growth, with reasoning as the foundation for moral functioning. Constructivist theory is based on developmental stages that are linear and hierarchical, with the higher stages requiring more complex reasoning. Theorists posit that through maturation and education, moral reasoning increases.

The former models offer a psychological perspective concerning how individuals mature morally; however, a debate exists among social scientists as to the best method of approaching moral reasoning/development research: by means of internalization, constructivist, or philosophic models.

Of concern with the psychological models is their limited philosophical foundation. Typically, psychological theorists shy away from values and concern themselves entirely with dialogue or the description of "what is." In contrast, philosophers are concerned with the values and beliefs that underlie moral understandings, dialogue, and behavior, as well as what ethically ought or should be.

While Kohlberg's (1981) work is primarily psychological, his theory relies heavily on the premise that universal values and ethical principles are formulated and justified by philosophy, not simply by psychological methods. Basic to his philosophic theory of moral change is cognitive disequilibrium. Individuals must be exposed to conflicting information, just ahead of their current stage of moral development. By producing conflict, individuals move toward a higher or more principled level of moral development. The introduction of conflict and questioning encourages students to develop rational, critical thinking processes. Kohlberg's description of cognitive disequilibrium parallels the philosophic method.

Although Haan (1977, 1983) and others may have used Kohlberg's (1981) cognitive disequilibrium strategy, the intent behind the dialogue is different. In particular, Haan stated that the purpose behind moral dialogue is to develop a consensus of views between two individuals. For the dialogue to function, participants involved in conflict are removed to a "listening bench" where individuals learn sensitivity toward the moral dialogue process. The process is more concerned with sensitivity to moral balance, maintaining the status quo, and harmony, rather than the fostering of critical thinking toward underlying moral principles.

The only studies on moral reasoning in sport to incorporate intervention strategies used social learning theory, cognitive development strategies, or a combination of the two to affect moral reasoning and development during actual gymnasium or field experiences. Specifically, the study by Wandzilak et al. (1988) involved a nine-week intervention of approximately fifteen minutes of daily discussion concerning moral issues and dilemmas relevant to male junior high school basketball athletes. Although the experimental group approached significance, no significant differences in either group's moral stage development or ability to reason morally were found from pretests to posttests. Interestingly, sportsmanlike behaviors decreased, while unsportsmanlike behaviors increased in the control group.

Using peer-oriented dialogue strategy, Bredemeier, Weiss, Shields, and Shewchuck (1986) studied children five to seven years of age in a youth sport setting. Significant differences were found for students involved in the oral dialogue program as compared to controls. Both Wandzilak et al. (1988) and Bredemeier et al, (1986) posited that intervention strategies were productive and beneficial for sport participants.

In terms of moral reasoning and moral development differences by gender, several descriptive studies have found that females score higher than

males on moral reasoning (Beller, 1991; Bredemeier & Shields, 1984, 1986; Hahm, 1989; Hall, 1981; Penny & Priest, 1990). The studies used the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory (Beller, 1991; Hahm, 1989; Penny & Priest, 1990), life and sport moral reasoning questionnaires (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986), and Hall's Sport Questionnaire (Hall, 1981), which have foundations in justice. The results appear to contradict Gilligan's (1982) and Murphy & Gilligan's (1980) theories which posit that females score lower as compared to males on moral reasoning and development when justice-defined instruments are used.

To date, no applied moral reasoning intervention programs based in normative, philosophic theory have been applied to NCAA Division I student-athletes. The question remained whether the philosophic method would produce moral reasoning and moral development changes in college age student-athletes. Using philosophic theory as a foundation and a course methodology founded in both psychology and philosophy, the current study was concerned with assessing cognitive developmental stages and moral reasoning processes in college age student-athletes. This study went beyond current psychological research in assessing and understanding current moral development levels, to actively produce an environment that would change cognitive development in university student-athletes.

METHOD

Course Development and Subjects

The university academic vice president granted permission to institute a two-credit university "Moral Reasoning in Sport" course during the 1989-1990 school year. The academic vice president authorized that the course met the NCAA 24-credit satisfactory progress rule, with the athletic director and staff strongly encouraging student-athlete participation.

The course was limited to an 18-week semester course and two 50-minute class periods per week. The course was taught by a physical education/sport philosopher, who is recognized as a master teacher and distinguished faculty member.

With probabilities proportionate to team size, 37 student-athletes out of a possible 169 were randomly selected to enroll in the moral reasoning course (24 males and 13 females). The remaining 132 student-athletes served as controls. During the moral reasoning/development course and its evaluation, all student-athletes were involved in their competitive seasons.

Treatment student-athletes received an intervention program consisting of an 18-week "Moral Reasoning in Sport" course, while the controls did not enroll in such a course. Both the course and the control student-athletes attended two 2-hour informational seminars on alcohol and drug use and rape prevention.

Course Content

With moral reasoning (Fox & DeMarco, 1990) as the foundation, the course content focused on analyzing four values: honesty, responsibility, justice, and beneficence. Student-athletes used theoretical as well as contemporary readings and sources. Class materials included a 210-page course guide with instructor notes, Simon's (1985) Sport and Social Values, and 14 contemporary readings concerning gender/racial inequalities, drug testing, performance enhancing drug use, gambling, rule violations, eligibility scandals, commercialized sport, winning, and competition. Class lectures and discussions involving both theory and application were supplemented with videotapes highlighting current sport moral issues.

Teaching Methodology

The course mode of instruction was "maieutic," meaning relating to, or resembling, the Socratic method. The interactive teaching method challenged participants to argue, question, and discuss an issue and all its collateral fibers and to understand the ramifications of all possible moral actions. The method used discussion, questions, and analysis, and student-athletes were encouraged to analyze their own beliefs as well as the beliefs of others. The discussion drew on the students' skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening and used those skills to sharpen the ability to think critically.

The instructor did not moralize; that is, the instructor did not prescribe rightness or right action rules. Rather, the instructor used maieutic questioning first to have student-athletes establish what they value and believe and second to encourage them to examine those beliefs and values relative to sport, academic, and personal moral issues. The only contact that student-athletes had with scenarios or hypothetical moral dilemmas was with the evaluation instruments.

Course Requirements

Course requirements included daily 5-point quizzes over reading and class discussions or lectures. Six papers of three to five pages concerning reasoning in sport, steroids and mechanization, beneficence to opponents, the need to win, winning, and athlete abuse were assigned. The final examination asked student-athletes to use good moral reasoning and resolve two of six moral dilemmas in sport. All classes were videotaped for student-athletes to view if they were absent from class.

Instruments

While a number of psychological, sociological, or philosophical instruments were available to measure moral reasoning and development, many suffer from problems in construct and content validity, threats to internal

validity, non-existent theoretical constructs, or subjective testing and scoring methods.

The current study was interested in the student-athletes' abilities to reason morally in both social and sport settings and in the research positing that student-athletes use different reasoning systems between sport and social settings (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986; Hall, 1981; Wandzilak et al., 1988). To date, no single instrument is available that measures both social and sport moral reasoning and development levels, so the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory in the Sport Milieu [Hahm-Beller] (Hahm, Beller, & Stoll, 1989a) and the Defining Issues Test [DIT] (Rest, 1979) were chosen.

The Hahm-Beller evaluates moral reasoning in the sport context, while the DIT assesses reasoning within the social construct. Both tests have a philosophical foundation, are objectively measured and scored, and have high validity and reliability indexes. Studies using both instruments have found that the Hahm-Beller and the DIT correlate at the .82 level (Hahm, 1989; Stoll & Beller, 1991). Furthermore, the theoretical foundation of both the Hahm-Beller and the DIT is deontic ethics.

Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory. The Hahm-Beller is comprised of 21 questions that ask participants to answer using a Likert Scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree (Hahm et al., 1989b). The scenarios ask participants to reason critically about various common moral dilemmas in sport, from the implications of the intentional foul, performance-enhancing drug use, and drug testing, to retaliation, responsibility for their own actions, and fairness to teammates and competitors. Higher scores reflect a consistent use of principles and reasoning which can be universally applied.

Defining Issues Test. The DIT (Rest, 1979) assesses moral development based on Kohlberg's interpretation of Piaget and deontic theory. Participants are asked to reason through six hypothetical moral dilemmas and rate the importance of the "moral issue" statements to decide on a course of action (Rest, 1986). Each statement corresponds to a particular developmental stage. As each stage is scored, the actual developmental stage, as well as the importance placed on "principled moral thinking" (or the "P" index), is obtained. Social rather than sport focused, the DIT gives an actual age group development score based on Kohlberg's stages of moral development.

Questionnaire Collection

All 169 subjects, university student-athletes in fall 1989, signed a letter of informed consent and were evaluated with the Hahm-Beller and the DIT. All student-athletes were given sixty minutes to complete the inventories.

During week 17, 30 of 37 treatment student-athletes (81%) were re-evaluated using the Hahm-Beller and the DIT. Seven students either disenrolled from the course by the end of the term or failed to finish the term. During

weeks 16-17, 99 of 132 control student-athletes (75%) were reevaluated using the Hahm-Beller and the DIT. The lower number of control student-athletes to be reevaluated was attributed to three factors: (1) non-scholarship student-athletes who tried out for positions on the fall teams but did not earn a place on the roster; (2) ineligible student-athletes who did not actually practice or compete during the term; and (3) scholarship student-athletes who quit their respective teams by the end of the term.

In August 1990, the year following the course, 21 course student-athletes post-posttested (57%), while 75 controls post-posttested (57%). The lower numbers in both groups' post-posttests were affected by those student-athletes who graduated or quit their teams.

Design and Analysis

The observational study used a pretest/posttest, randomized groups design. An ANOVA using a repeated measures design was used to detect significant differences between main effects and interactions. Sources of variation for the main effects were Treatment (course or control), Gender (male or female), and Time (pretest or posttest). Interaction effects included Gender*TRT, Time*TRT, Time*Gender, and Time*TRT*Gender. Because of uneven cell sizes, the General Linear Model (GLM) was used to detect significant differences in main effects as well as interactions. After a significant F test, Fisher's Protected LSD procedure was performed to determine which means were significantly different. Experimentwise error rates were controlled at a level to the F test alpha level, $p < .05$.

The study's independent variables included treatment, gender, and time. The dependent variables included the Hahm-Beller total scores (21 questions) and the DIT's "P" index scores.

RESULTS

Relative to the interaction of Time*TRT on the Hahm-Beller, significant differences were found, with student-athletes enrolled in the "Moral Reasoning in Sport" course scoring significantly higher from pretest ($\underline{M}$ = 66.96) to posttest ($\underline{M}$ = 72.27) and control student-athletes scoring significantly lower from pretest ($\underline{M}$ = 62.06) to posttest ($\underline{M}$ = 56.02) ($F[1,2] = 584.13$, $p < .0001$). (See Table 1.)

A significant difference was found by gender on the Hahm-Beller in Division I student-athletes' moral reasoning scores, with females ($\underline{M}$ = 66.62) regardless of whether controls or enrolled in the course scoring significantly higher than males ($\underline{M}$ = 57.13) ($F[1,2] = 1501.65$, $p < .0001$). (See Table 2.)

No significant differences were found in the DIT's "P" index scores with TRT ($F[1,2] = 0.72$, $p > .05$), Gender ($F[1,2] = .06$, $p > .05$), and the interactions of Time*Gender ($F[1,2] = 1.28$, $p > .05$), TRT*Gender ($F[1,2] = .06$, $p > .05$) and Time*TRT*Gender ($F[1,2] = 0.60$, $p > .05$). Although no

Table 1

Least Square Means for Time*TRT Total Reasoning Scores on the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory

Time*TRT	Course		
	N	LSM	SEM
Pre	30	66.96_a	0.48
Post	30	72.27_b	0.48
Post-posttest	21	71.01_b	0.62
	Control		
	N	LSM	SEM
Pre	99	62.06_a	0.30
Post	99	56.02_b	0.30
Post-posttest	75	57.12_b	0.46

Note: Moral reasoning maximum score = 105. Means with different subscripts differ signifcantly at p<.0001.

significant differences were found with Time ($F[1,2] = 11.02$, $p < .09$) or the Time*TRT interaction ($F[1,2] = 10.16$, $p < .08$), both approached significance. Specifically, course student-athletes' scores increased from pretest (M = 23.85) to posttest (M = 33.66), while controls' scores remained relatively stable (pretest M = 31.47 and posttest M = 31.11). (See Table 3.) Matched pair return rates, however, were extremely low: course = 44.7% and control = 26.8%.

Using the Hahm-Beller, post-posttests in both course (M = 71.01) and control (M = 56.02) found no significant differences ($F[1,2] = 579.23$, $p > .05$) in moral reasoning scores from the initial posttest (course M = 72.27 and control M = 57.12). (See Table 1.) Due to limited funds, no DIT post-posttests were administered.

Table 2

Least Square Means for Gender Reasoning Scores on the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory

Gender	N	LSM	SEM
Male	92	57.13_a	1.48
Female	37	66.26_b	2.69

Note: Total moral reasoning score = 105. Means with different subscripts differ signifcantly at p<.0001.

Table 3

Least Square Means for Time*TRT "P" Index Scores on the Defining Issues Test

Time*TRT	Course		
	N	LSM	SEM
Pre	20	23.85_a	3.16
Post	20	33.66_b	3.10
	Control		
	N	LSM	SEM
Pre	33	31.47_b	2.22
Post	33	31.11_b	2.18

Note: A higher score reflects a higher stage level of moral development. Means with different subscripts approach significance at p<.08.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this philosophic experimental study was to analyze changes that occurred in student-athletes' cognitive moral reasoning during an

intensive 18-week "Moral Reasoning in Sport" course. The current study is unique in the fact that philosophical, psychological, and experimental methods were used to attempt changes in student-athletes' abilities to think critically. The course's goal was to teach student-athletes to think for themselves, question the status quo, and make decisions based on impartiality, reflection, and consistency.

Overall, student-athletes who enrolled and finished the course used a significantly higher reasoned approach on the Hahm-Beller from pretests to posttests compared to their student-athlete peers. Of interest, however, is that while course student-athletes scored significantly higher from pretest to posttest, control student-athletes significantly decreased their total reasoning scores. While it was posited that an intensive "Moral Reasoning in Sport" course would increase student-athletes' abilities to reason critically, the significant decrease in control scores from pretest to posttest was unexpected. Perhaps the results reflect current research and theory stating that the longer an individual participates in sport, the less moral their actions become (Coakley, 1982; Kroll, 1975; Potter & Wandzilak, 1981; Stevenson, 1975; Wandzilak et al., 1988). Possibly the scores decreased because posttests were given during the height of the student-athletes' competitive seasons and control student-athletes were unable and/or unwilling to step back and reflect on questions of moral significance in sport and society.

The significant decrease suggests that control student-athletes had limited ability to use moral reasoning. After 18 weeks of intense competition and practice, control student-athletes were apparently less tolerant of the concepts of fairness, responsibility, and honesty, while course student-athletes were more tolerant. This result may be related to what Bredemeier (1984) states are tendencies to objectify opponents and to place responsibility for personal actions onto coaches and officials for personal gain. Because student-athletes are so immersed in their athletic world, they might be expected to have at least a minimal notion of what is morally right and wrong within the sport context. Student-athletes before taking the course and control student-athletes, however, appeared out of touch with their beliefs and values.

In a subjective sense, the scenario described above seemed to be played out in the classroom. During initial class discussions, course student-athletes appeared to consider right relative to winning, championships, and prestige, with little regard for the rights and feelings of others. Yet the course student-athletes seemed to have a conception of what was morally right. Statements such as "We know what is right and wrong; it's just that we forget when we get here" and "My mother taught me what was right and wrong; it's just that sometimes we have to cheat to win" were common during the first few weeks of the course. Consequently, while trying to reason through sport and social dilemmas, these student-athletes appeared to encounter much confusion concerning their beliefs and values. As the course progressed, however, student-athletes seemed to realize their inconsistencies and gained knowledge of good moral reasoning strategies (i.e., impartial, reflective, and consistent

reasoning). They began to defend better their beliefs and values relative to sport and social moral issues. Perhaps the decrease in control scores is directly attributable to the fact that they did not have reasoning skills as good as those of course student-athletes and/or they were not in touch with their values relative to current moral issues.

Of interest is that women scored significantly higher than males from pretest to posttest on total deontological reasoning, which agrees with studies by Beller (1991), Bredemeier and Shields (1984, 1986), Hahm (1989), and Penny and Priest (1990). The results are interesting in that, on the whole, few methodologically or theoretically sound psychological studies have found significant differences by gender. The results appear to refute Gilligan's (1977) and Murphy and Gilligan's (1980) theories that women score lower on justice defined instruments. Future research must establish whether the gender differences hold true across a broader student-athlete population and, if the results do hold true, must posit reasons for the differences.

The DIT was used to determine "P" index scores of all student-athletes enrolled in the course or serving as controls. Because the test has three stringent consistency checks to question the subjects' seriousness and understanding concerning the test, Rest (1986) states that as much as 30% of a sample may be lost. Although most of the current study's student-athletes appeared focused and directed toward taking the tests, the high number of tests that did not pass consistency checks may prove otherwise.

Student-athletes enrolled in the course had DIT pretest least square means of 23.85 and posttest means of 33.66. In contrast, control student-athlete scores remained stable from pretest ($\underline{M}$ = 31.47) to posttest ($\underline{M}$ = 31.11). Consequently, the increase in course student-athlete scores and the stable control scores made the time factor approach significant. Moreover, when the Time*TRT interaction was analyzed, student-athletes increased their "P" index scores from pretests to posttests, which is consistent with the results found on the Hahm-Beller. Even though the increase in course DIT "P" index scores only approached significance, the DIT results may be meaningful because the scores reflect a significant increase found with the Hahm-Beller, and the DIT and Hahm-Beller correlated at .82.

While control student-athletes appeared to have a higher level of pretest principled moral thinking compared to course student-athletes, course student-athletes increased their stage level over time. The control least square means, however, account for only 26.8% of the total control sample. Thus, the conclusion that controls used more highly principled moral thinking on the pre-evaluation is suspect. Because of low return rates for both groups, however, results from the DIT must be viewed with caution. Of interest is that consistency checks for course student-athletes substantially increased to 66% for posttests, while controls only improved to 39%.

Past studies have shown that student-athletes do not reason as well as non-athletes (Beller, 1991; Hahm, 1989; Penny & Priest, 1990). Perhaps this

has to do with immaturity, limited social lives, and non-sophistication (Mandell, 1975). Because student-athletes may not reason as well as non-athlete populations, and because the DIT's scenarios are hypothetical and too removed from daily life, the DIT may not be the best evaluative tool on the moral development of athletic populations.

While student-athletes enrolled in the course significantly increased their moral reasoning scores on the Hahm-Beller from pretest to posttest, post-posttest scores eight months later showed no significant change for either course or control groups. Student-athletes who enrolled in the course were still able to use moral reasoning in moral issues directed toward sport, which perhaps implies that the reasoning effect was longitudinal and resisted change. The scores for the control group remained at their posttest levels, which was still significantly lower than their pretest scores from the previous August. This finding supports the theories of Coakley (1982), Kroll (1975), Potter and Wandzilak (1981), Stevenson (1975), and Wandzilak et al. (1988) that the longer student-athletes are involved in sport without intervention, the less reasoned and moral their actions become.

CONCLUSION

Intervention programs to improve moral reasoning and development in sport participants are difficult in the sense of teaching methodology and course content. The present study, however, holds promise and potential for incorporating moral reasoning intervention for sport participants. The program is based on a single concept: teaching people to think critically, through cognitive disequilibrium. Such research should foster a new age of intervention for moral reasoning in sport. Future studies should focus on applying the moral reasoning concept and intervention to different age groups and possibly within the sport setting, i.e., on the playing field or in the gymnasium.

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