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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether religious education courses in the basic studies curriculum affected moral reasoning about competition among athletes and nonathletes in four small colleges. Participants (N=285) completed the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory. Nonathletes (NA) scored significantly higher than did athletes in team sports (TS), but not significantly higher than those in individual sports (IS). IS athletes also scored significantly higher than TS athletes. Females scored higher than males in all categories, with IS females scoring significantly higher than both TS females and IS males, and NA females scoring significantly higher than all other categories. Results suggest that whatever impact religious education courses may have does not seem to carry over to the sport environment. Further studies are recommended. (Contains 38 references.) (PB)

Running Head: MORAL REASONING, COMPETITION & CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

# The Relationship of Competition and a Christian Liberal Arts Education on Moral Reasoning of College Student Athletes.

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Abstract

A strong belief exists that colleges with a mission and basic studies curriculum emphasizing a Christian liberal arts education positively affect their students' moral reasoning. The belief holds that through religious studies in a basic studies curriculum and role modeling, individuals are able to generalize these teachings to their personal, social, and competitive lives. The literature suggests however, that taking these courses and role modeling do not by themselves improve cognitive moral reasoning. This study's purpose was to examine whether religious education courses in the basic studies curriculum could affect moral reasoning about competition of athletes and nonathletes in four small colleges. Participants included 285 randomly selected individuals, with 117 males, 168 females, 139 team sport, 36 individual sport, and 110 nonathletes. All participants were evaluated with the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory, a valid and reliable instrument for measuring moral reasoning in sport. ANOVA procedures found that with Status (nonathlete [NA], team sport [TS], individual sport [IS]) a significant difference was found ($F[2,280]$ 10.62 $p < .0001$). Fisher's LSD procedures found that NA ($M$=75.31 SD $\pm$ 9.77) scored significantly higher than TS ($M$=69.56 SD $\pm$ 9.95) although not significantly different than IS ($M$=75.21 SD $\pm$ 11.43), and IS scored significantly higher than TS. A significant difference was found ($F[1,280]$ 88.13 $p < .0001$) by gender with females ($M$=76.61 SD $\pm$ 9.32) scoring higher than males (M=70.11 SD=10.52). The interaction of gender by status was significant ($F[2,280)$ 3.00 $p < .0001$). Male NA scored significantly higher ($M$=73.30 SD $\pm$ 10.94) than Male TS ($M$=65.13 SD $\pm$ 8.68); Male IS ($M$=71.89 SD $\pm$ 12.53) scored significantly higher than male TS; female NA were significantly higher ($M$=77.33 SD $\pm$ 9.21) than female TS ($M$=73.99 SD $\pm$ 9.18); female IS were significantly higher ($M$=78.53 SD $\pm$ 9.19) than female TS ($M$=73.99 SD $\pm$ 9.18) and male TS ($M$=65.13 SD $\pm$ 8.68); Female TS ($M$=73.99 SD $\pm$ 9.18) scored significantly higher than male TS ($M$=65.13 SD $\pm$ 8.68); Female IS ($M$=78.53 SD $\pm$ 9.19) scored significantly higher than male TS ($M$=65.13 SD $\pm$ 8.68) and male IS ($M$=71.89 SD $\pm$ 12.53). Results suggest

that religion classes in basic studies curriculum do not carry over to the sport environment, probably because of course teaching methodology, selectivity of what is addressed, or perhaps a lack of knowledge of how this education relates to sport. Terms: Sport ethics, moral reasoning, moral development, moral education.

## Introduction:

For years educators have recognized the differences of purpose, mission, instruction, traditions, and extra-curricular activities of various types of educational institutions and their concomitant effects on students' choice of attendance (Astin, 1978; Bowen, 1980). Admissions Officers and other university personnel argue that students choose small liberal arts institutions with a religious mission and educational focus because of a purported institutional value structure that is consistent with students' personal value and belief structure. Proponents argue that because of the small college's intimate atmosphere, commitment to a religious mission, environment, and educational focus, their education positively affects and enhances students' moral reasoning and moral development. The belief holds that through religious studies, role modeling, and a supportive environment, individuals are able to generalize these Christian teachings to their personal, social, and competitive lives.

Research, though is mixed concerning the effect of a religious college's impact on students' moral reasoning and moral development. For years, researchers have attempted to quantify the effect of religion on moral reasoning and moral development, with studies falling into basically seven categories: 1) attendance at church-affiliated institutions, 2) affiliation or membership in congregations or religious groups, 3) religious behavior, 4) religious knowledge, 5) religious ideology, 6) religious experiences, and 7) intrinsic/extrinsic motivation (Getz, 1984). This review will examine the results of studies in two areas, the effect of: 1) religious educational institutions and 2) religious activities on students' moral reasoning and moral development.

Exposure to Religious Education:

Wolf (1980) found that college-aged students with high exposure to religious education had significantly lower principled level thinking. Moreover, Wolf found that students with high exposure to religious education and high commitment, used lower principled level reasoning. In contrast, Burwell (1992) found that students attending three Christian liberal arts institutions significantly improved in moral reasoning from their freshman through senior year. Similarly, Shaver (1987) found that college students attending a Christian Liberal Arts institution increased in their moral development over the fours years of attendance. Towers (1984) and Shaver (1985) found that liberal arts students at one university and several Christian colleges principled moral reasoning increased over their four year educational career.

Moreover, Rest (1986) stated that religious training has a low positive relationship (depending on whether the student is instructed in assuming responsibility for personal decisions or required to strictly obey an "external authority"). Yet, Blackner (1975), assessing ninth grade through post-high school students found no relationship between religious education and moral judgment.

Religious College Experiences:

Volker, (1979) examined the relationship of college experiences to level of moral judgment and found that a significant negative correlation existed between high principled thinking and conservative religious beliefs, a non significant relationship existed between principled moral reasoning and religious experiences, and a non significant but positive relationship existed between high principled moral reasoning and low levels of religious activity. Schomberg (1978), on the other hand, found a non significant relationship between university freshmen participation in religious activities and levels of moral judgment, while Harris (1981) found a significant relationship between moral judgment and religious knowledge, yet a non significant relationship between moral judgment and practice.

The Effect of Religious Education on Competition:

Few studies, though, have examined the effect of competition on moral reasoning and moral development of student athletes attending Christian liberal arts institutions. Burwell & Cole (1993), using the HBVCI pre and post tested students at a Christian liberal arts institution enrolled in a course entitled "Sport and Ethics" which was part of the "Modern Issues and Christian Values" Course. While they did not examine the differences between student athletes and nonathletes, they found that students' moral reasoning about commonly occurring sport moral issues did not significantly increase pre to posttest.

Questions arise though, as to whether sport in Division III schools, especially those with a Christian liberal arts focus actually model, support, and educate through the ideal sport competition. Research has well-established that participation in sport, whether interscholastic, Division I intercollegiate, or Olympic levels, negatively affects moral reasoning and moral development (Beller & Stoll, 1994; Beller & Stoll, in press; Bredemeier, 1984; Bredemeier & Shields, 1986; Krause & Priest, 1994; Penny & Priest, 1990; Stoll & Beller, 1992) with athletes' moral reasoning significantly different compared to their nonathletic peers. The arguments concerning these negative affects involve two basic premises: 1) that the money in Division I sport corrupts the ideal of the student-athlete and 2) that Division I athletics promotes a win-at-all-costs attitude and it's focus is entertainment rather than education. When related to moral reasoning and moral development, the belief exists that the money and a win-at-costs attitude taints Division I athletics and negatively affects athletes' moral reasoning.

Yet, because Division III programs generate limited revenue and have no athletic grant-in-aid scholarships, it has been argued that the ideal educational/ athletic model flourishes. And, because of this educational ideal, athletes' moral reasoning and moral development are not negatively affected. Moreover, it is a commonly held belief by Christian liberal arts Division III athletic programs that the religious mission and educational study helps athletics be conducted within an ideal of sportsmanship, respect, and common decency. This belief may typified by the following Christian college athletic department mission statement:

Athletics at the University ... is committed to providing an opportunity for students to compete in intercollegiate sports in an educationally sound environment. The program is properly administered in such a way that athletics remains in keeping with the college's liberal arts tradition. Athletics is a part of the total educational process and there is a broad base of opportunity for participation. The program creates a rallying point for students, faculty, staff, and alumni while still enhancing educational values. It is understood that, while striving to be competitive, institutional integrity should never be sacrificed for the sake of athletic victory. Athletics at university ... exists within the educational mainstream of the college and is administered with the same controls, budgetary procedures, and program responsibility as any other academic or administrative function" (Athletic Department, 1991, p.1).

As such, the belief exists that athletic participation is integrated within the total educational search for excellence and the truth, or as Simon (1985) states "sport is a mutual quest for excellence". Yet, what affect does the Christian liberal arts education have on moral reasoning and moral development of student athletes?

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the moral reasoning of nonathletes, team sport athletes, and individual sport athletes enrolled in small colleges (1,500 to 2,500 students) wherein religious training is directly stated as part of their mission and is required in their basic studies programs. That is, the institution's purpose in Christian liberal arts colleges is to integrate a Christian world view to contemporary society sociologically, historically, philosophically, and scientifically and to help individuals better integrate Christian beliefs in their personal and professional lives.

Methodology:

Selection of Subjects:

Subjects were 360 college aged males and females enrolled in four small colleges with religious missions that require religious study in their Basic Studies programs. Athletes were randomly selected from male and female soccer and cross country teams, while nonathletes were randomly selected from general university students. Ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-eight, with all subjects signing informed consent.

A total of 285 student athletes and nonathletes participated in the study with 117 males and 168 females. One-hundred and thirty nine (139) team sport athletes, 36 individual sport athletes, and 110 non-athletes completed the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory.

The Instrument:

All subjects were evaluated with the Hahm-Beller values Choice Inventory in the Sport Milieu (HBVCI). The HBVCI is a reliable and valid tool for measuring moral reasoning in the sport context (Beller, Stoll, & Hahm, 1992). The inventory consists of twenty one questions that ask students to respond to one of five responses on a Likert Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The copyrighted instrument questions how individuals reason morally about commonly occurring moral issues or dilemmas in sport. A higher score reflects a more consistent use of moral principles that can be universally applied. To clarify, "[m]oral reasoning is the ability to systematically think though a moral problem taking into consideration one's own values and beliefs while weighing them against what others and society values and believes" (Lumpkin, Stoll & Beller, 1995, p.1).

Design and Analysis:

A Gender [male, female] (2) X Status [nonathlete, team sport athlete, individual sport athlete] ANOVA using the general linear model (GLM in SAS) was used to detect differences among main effects and interactions, with alpha set at $p < .05$. Sums of the twenty one questions were used to give a total score. After a significant F test, Fisher's LSD procedures were performed to detect which means were significantly different.

Results:

As per the original research questions, the following results were found:

Main Effects:

With the main effect of Status a significant difference was found (F[2,280] 10.62 $p < .0001$). After Fisher's LSD Procedures, nonathletes scored significantly higher ($M = 75.31$ SD $\pm$ 9.77) than team sport athletes ($M = 69.56$ SD $\pm$ 9.95) but not significantly different than individual sport athletes ($M = 75.21$ SD $\pm$ 11.43), however, individual sport athletes (M=75.21 SD $\pm$ 11.43) did score significantly higher than team sport athletes (M=69.56 SD $\pm$ 9.95) (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

The main effect of Gender found that females ($M = 76.61$ SD $\pm$ 9.32) were significantly higher than males ($M = 70.11$ SD $\pm$ 10.52) (F[1,280] 88.13 $p < .0001$) (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Two Way Interactions:

A significant difference was found with the interaction of Gender X Status (F[2,280] 3.00 $p < .0001$). After Fisher's Protected LSD procedures, male nonathletes were significantly higher ($M = 73.30$ SD $\pm$ 10.94) than male team sport athletes ($M = 65.13$ SD $\pm$ 8.68). Male individual sport athletes scored significantly higher ($M = 71.89$ SD $\pm$ 12.53) than male team sport athletes ($M = 65.13$ SD $\pm$ 8.68). Female nonathletes scored significantly higher ($M = 77.33$ SD $\pm$ 9.21) than male team sport ($M = 65.13$ SD $\pm$ 8.68), male individual sport

(M=71.89 SD ± 12.53), and female team sport athletes (M = 73.99 SD ± 9.18) (see Table 3) .

Female team sport athletes are significantly higher (M = 73.99 SD ± 9.18) than male team sport athletes (M = 65.13 SD ± 8.68). Female individual sport athletes are significantly higher (M = 78.53 SD ± 9.19) than male team sport (M = 65.13 SD ± 8.68), male individual sport athletes (M = 71.89 SD ± 12.53), and female team sport athletes (M=73.99 SD ± 9.18) (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion of Findings:

Originally we wondered whether religious education and a supportive religious educational environment would have an effect on nonathletes' and student athlete's moral reasoning in sport.

Status:

With status, a significant difference was also found. On the whole, nonathletes scored significantly higher than team sport athletes but not significantly different than individual sport athletes. Although previous studies using the HBVCI have found that nonathletes score significantly higher than team sport athletes, most have also found that nonathletes score significantly higher than individual sport athletes. The current study has found that nonathletes score similarly to individual sport athletes. Individual sport athletes did score significantly higher than team sport athletes, which is consistent with research using the HBVCI.

Gender:

When we examined the hypotheses concerning Gender, the results are fairly consistent with what has been found in all but one study with the HBVCI (Beller, 1990; Beller & Stoll, 1992; Beller & Stoll, in press; Hahm, 1989; Penny

& Priest, 1990). Overall, females scored significantly higher than males and female athletes score significantly higher than male athletes. Of interest though, is what may occur to female athletes' moral reasoning over time. Specifically, longitudinal data with the HBVCI shows a trend that female mean scores appear to be declining over the six years the instrument has been implemented (Beller & Stoll, 1995). Some hypothesize that women's programs, since leaving the AIAW and becoming a part of the NCAA, have bought into the current model of gamesmanship, historically and commonly practiced in men's programs, and therefore, over time female scores will reflect men's scores (Beller & Stoll, 1995; Stoll & Durrant, 1994).

Summary:

A belief has existed that the problems with moral reasoning, moral development and ethics in sport today exists primarily in Division I sport. Specifically, the level of competition is perceived to be much different and to have a much greater effect on players in Division I as compared to Division II, Division III, or NAIA schools. Many believe that the Division II and III schools have a more positive effect on sportsmanship, moral reasoning, common decency and so forth. However, the current study as well as a study conducted by Stoll and Beller (1993) with a NAIA school and high schools within one of the largest school districts in the country (Beller & Stoll, in press) have found that athletes moral reasoning is negatively affected in all levels of sport compared to their nonathletic peers. Specifically with the present study, Christian liberal arts institutions' teams sport athletes scored significantly lower compared to their peer nonathletes, which again is consistent with other studies using the HBVCI.

Upon further examination relative to moral development/ reasoning theory, and what is known about moral development, moral education (and the complexities of teaching using effective moral reasoning methodology), we wondered whether the differences found in the current study could be attributed to some other factors. Perhaps the differences found were not based on the effects of religious education/training, as much as the values and beliefs that students

bring to these colleges. In other words, as Astin (1978) and Bowen (1980) stated, students with certain value orientations may choose a particular type of school that matches their value orientations. Although the original hypotheses did not include an analysis by age, and because the information was available, we ran an ANOVA to see if this hypothesis was true. A trend emerged. Specifically, the 17-18 year old team sport athletes' moral reasoning (M=72.06) concerning sport moral issues, were higher compared to the 19 (M=68.25) and 22 year old team sport athletes (M=68.95). Nineteen year old nonathletes' mean scores (M=78.48) were higher than 17-18 (M=74.56) and 20-22 year old nonathletes (M=75.28). And, individual sport 19 year olds' mean score (M=81.13) was higher than both 17-18 (M=75.90) and 20-22 (M=71.83) year old individual sport athletes) (see Table 4).

Insert Table 4 about here

Consequently, if religious training at these institutions raised moral reasoning, then would not the scores improve over time? The answer appears to be "no". Perhaps, how sport is taught and modeled today places individuals in situations of competing values and beliefs structures (Beller & Stoll, 1993). And, perhaps religious education is not as effective addressing these competing value systems. A study by Darley & Batson (1973) supports this hypothesis that competing values may influence an individual's ability to use higher principled level thinking. Their study found that seminarians, although using high principled moral reasoning on a pen and pencil moral development test, when given conflicting values, such as time, actually used less principled moral reasoning. What the scores in the current study do tell us is that young people who choose to attend Christian liberal arts institutions have a strong value structure when they enroll which affects their ability to make decisions about moral issues. Yet, maybe the way sport is modeled, taught, and socialized today, affects athletes' and nonathletes' ability to use their personal and Christian value structure to

address sport moral issues. Perhaps, individuals have learned to compartmentalize this belief structure during sport competition.

The Importance of the Current Study:

Assessing the effect of competition on athletes' and nonathletes' moral reasoning in Division III Christian liberal arts schools, is a beginning. This assessment, however, is only a piece to the puzzle of how we learn morally. Inherent within this assessment must be an understanding of how we currently teach, model, and educate morally within the sport and education milieus. Moreover, it is imperative to the process that we understand:

1) Competition itself is neither good nor bad, rather it is the emphasis we place on the winning to the exclusion of others that negatively effects moral reasoning and moral development. Therefore, athletes participating in religious education colleges perhaps should be involved in moral reasoning intervention programs to positively affect their moral reasoning and cognitive moral development.

2) Research has found that it takes a very specific moral reasoning methodology to affect moral reasoning and development (Power, 1989; Reimer, Paolitto, & Hersh, 1983; Stoll & Beller, 1994). This moral reasoning methodology is characterized by a student-based oral reasoning, dialogue, and cognitive dissonance. All action is typically toward students interacting with self, students, and the teacher. "The spontaneous teacher questioning ... [is] directed toward specific students, incorporate[s] second order questions, and force[s] cognitive disequilibrium" (Stoll & Beller, 1994, p. 11).

Results from the current study suggest that if moral reasoning and moral development are important to the mission of Christian liberal arts institutions, there needs to be an re-examination of how moral education is addressed and taught in the curriculum. If results of the current study hold consistent, probably all students would benefit from a moral reasoning intervention program.

3) Finally, studies need to be conducted to see what happens to moral reasoning and moral development of athletes and nonathletes at religious education schools over time. Freshmen students and athletes should be evaluated their first year and reassessed at the end of their four year college experience. Because the current study was limited to assessing moral reasoning in the sport milieu, perhaps students compartmentalize moral reasoning when it comes to the sport experience. Because research is currently mixed, to better understand the nature of moral growth in Christian liberal arts institutions, perhaps, future studies should use the HBVCI, as well as the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1981), a valid and reliable instrument for measuring moral development in the social milieu.

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Table 1

Athletes' and Nonathletes' Moral Reasoning Mean Scores on the HBVCI

| Status | N | LSM | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nonathlete | 110 | 75.31 a | 9.77 |
| Team Sport Athlete | 139 | 69.56 b | 9.95 |
| Individual Sport Athlete | 36 | 75.21 a | 11.43 |

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

Table 2

Male and Female Moral Reasoning Mean Scores on the HBVCI

| Gender | N | LSM | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 117 | 70.11 a | 10.52 |
| Female | 168 | 76.61 b | 9.32 |

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

Table 3

Gender by Status Moral Reasoning Mean Scores on the HBVCI

| Status | N | LSM | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Male** | | | |
| Nonathlete | 27 | 73.30 a c | 10.94 |
| Team Sport Athlete | 71 | 65.13 b | 8.68 |
| Individual Sport Athlete | 19 | 71.89 a | 12.53 |
| **Female** | | | |
| Nonathlete | 83 | 77.33 c | 9.21 |
| Team Sport Athlete | 68 | 73.99 d a | 9.18 |
| Individual Sport Athlete | 17 | 78.53 c | 9.19 |

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

Table 4

Moral Reasoning Mean Scores on the HBVCI by Status and Age

Status

| | LSM | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Age | | |
| | 17-18 | 19 | 20-22 |
| Nonathlete | 74.56 | 78.48 | 75.28 |
| N | 43 | 23 | 45 |
| Team Sport Athlete | 72.06 | 68.25 | 68.95 |
| N | 33 | 44 | 61 |
| Individual Sport Athlete | 75.90 | 81.13 | 71.83 |
| N | 10 | 8 | 18 |

Note. Total moral reasoning score = 105. No significant difference found; no increased moral reasoning scores by age.