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College Sport Ethics: Moral versus Consequentialist Drivers of Student Ethics in Sport Activities

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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This study aims at explaining why college students cheat in sport activities. Knowing what induces students to cheat from their own rationale for cheating is the first objective and uncovers the first gap. Understanding how students solve ethical dilemmas in general and how such routine is applied to sport activities is the second objective and leads to visualize the second gap. The first research gap lies in how the consequential evaluation of student sport behavior prevent, when used alone, the ethical evaluation of student sport behavior. Both, the motivations of student cheat in sport (Marasescu, 2012; Payne, 2011), and the understanding of how they solve ethical dilemmas in the sport context are fundamentally affected by such limitation. The second research gap relates to how sport behavior at the school is transferred to professional sports and the consequences therein (Flores and Vasquez-Parraga, 2010; Whisenant et. al., 2010). The contribution of this study focuses on the first research gap but has implications towards the second research gap.

Based on empirical research, this study evaluates the competing roles of morality or deontological norms and the consequences or teleological norms in the formation of ethical judgment and ethical intentions (Hunt and Vitell, 1986). Previous research shows that the deontological norms prevail over the teleological norms; notwithstanding their debatable effects in situations involving ethical dilemmas versus those that do not (Hunt and Vasquez-Parraga, 1993). This ethics theory and methodology were applied to a 2 x 2 randomized experimental design and a scenario reflecting a student conduct in a sport routine that included a moral or immoral act with positive or negative consequences to the actor. Two outcome variables were examined, ethical judgment and intention to act. In addition, student motivations to cheat in sports were identified using 18 items newly developed for this research on the basis of the literature and sport media; and three student demographic characteristics (age, sex, and family size) were considered. The questionnaires were distributed randomly to the cluster samples (four assigned groups) in three large U.S. universities, making sure to achieve an almost equal number of respondents per group in the design, and to include graduate and undergraduate students practicing the following sports: basketball, soccer, baseball, and Olympic sports.

The results reveal that students are guided by three motivations when cheating in sports: winning, public recognition, and opportunism. The experiment reveals that the role of deontological evaluations is greater than the role of teleological evaluations in explaining an ethical judgment. And yet, students confronting ethical dilemmas in sport activities often fail to recognize that a moral act is ethical when it involves negative consequences, or that an immoral act is unethical when it involves positive consequences. When explaining the intention to act, however, the role of ethical judgment is comparable to the role of teleological evaluations. Students confronting ethical dilemmas in sport activities often reward an immoral act that brings positive consequences or punish a moral act that brings negative consequences, demonstrating that consequences impact more on intentions than on judgments, and that therefore, there is a gap between the judgment and intention in ethical decision-making.

In addition, a motivational factor (“pressure to win”) and three demographic characteristics (age, sex and family size) increase the explanatory power of the two evaluations, deontological and teleological, on ethical judgment, and the explanatory power of ethical judgment and teleological evaluations on intention to act. The corroboration of the theoretical framework and methodology used here in previous studies involving managers, consumers and college students with students practicing sports has important implication for theory and practice.

Keywords: Sport ethics; college student ethics; moral versus consequentialist drivers.

(References can be provided upon request)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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